

OTHER PEOPLE'S
HOUSES

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OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES



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TORONTO

OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES

BY

E. B. DEWING

(Mrs. Elizabeth Bartol (Dewing) Kaup)

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1909

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Set up and electrotyped. Published October, 1909.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

When the Soul of Man does battle with the Forces of Nature,
it is the Forces of Nature which are deathless.

— EGYPTIAN PROVERB.

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OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES

CHAPTER I

THE GIRDLE OF VENUS

I

"VENUS, one of the most celebrated deities of the ancients, the goddess of love and beauty. In the Iliad she is presented as the daughter of Jupiter and Dione and in later traditions as the daughter of Euonyme and Cronos, but the legend of Venus sprung from the froth of the sea is the most known. She arose from the sea near the island of Cyprus, or, according to Hesiod, of Cythera, whither she was wafted by the zephyrs, and received on the seashore by the seasons, daughters of Jupiter and Themis. She surpassed all the goddesses in beauty, and likewise had the power of granting beauty and invincible charm to others. She was the owner of a celebrated girdle which when worn even by the most deformed excited love and rekindled extinguished flames. . . ."

Emily Stedman closed her book. She was conscious

of a fixed glare from the spectacles of the librarian's assistant. Their possessor had evidently given them an added polish; and it behooved her to treat them well, for without them she would have been a meek young woman enough. With them she struck terror into the hearts of her beholders. That may have been her purpose — the savage custom of decorating the body with bright paints and feathers is often attributed to a similar one. Miss Smith would have denied the parallel; but Miss Smith led a life of denials, she was the assistant librarian at Hornmouth. And Emily Stedman was the only daughter of Hornmouth's most cherished professor.

She sat very still. She could hear the scratching pen of the young man next to her and the slow, even ticking of the clock. She gazed a little longingly at the ponderous volume before her. She couldn't carry on her highly important researches in the presence of the spectacles. "Venus sprung from the froth of the sea. . . ." What had Miss Smith to do with Venus? . . . Minerva, rather! As she sat at her neat desk, pen poised in air, cataloguing, labelling, the wisdom of the ages must have passed through her arranging hands. Emily Stedman envied Miss Smith in the same moment that she despised her. She envied her her community with the wisdom of the ages; she despised her for the little use she made of it. If she herself were strong and old, — if she herself were the assistant librarian at Hornmouth, — the wisdom of the ages would be something more to her than a mere dry mass of printed paper; it would be part of herself. Wisdom was the knowl-

edge of the minds of men; and she with the knowledge of the minds of men — her vision was of great power and of great glory, and the books in the Hornmouth library seemed to her like living things.

But she never could be even an assistant librarian. Wisdom, save for an occasional ecstatic licking of the plate, was the thing most forbidden her. Born into a fraternity of scholars, the joys of scholarship could never be hers. There had been too many scholars already — too many bent shoulders and strained eyes; the learned blood was running thin. That she lived at all was a triumph of mind over matter; and she had a mind, even at the age of fourteen. For many generations the learned mind had been developed at the expense of the learned body.

She looked a little longingly at the closed book on the table before her — and then her regard wandered to the statue in the corner. This statue presented the goddess of love as a naked and armless, but nevertheless dignified, woman — smoothly made — who gazed out at a mutable world with a slow, ruminating expression almost bovine. She hadn't *sprung* from anything — surely not from the froth of the sea. Beautiful, but too calm, too passive. Emily's ideal of Venus was the reverse of passive. She saw her, rather, as a splendid, victorious figure — vital — restless — a Bellona with dishevelled hair and a flaming torch, standing in the midst of a stormy ocean, her mouth opened round in a great shout. For a young lady who cared so much for wisdom, Miss Stedman had a wonderful fondness for war. When she lay awake at night,

the shadows cast by her flickering candle were men fighting, and the various night noises, the crickets and the locusts and the rustling wind, were the tramp of marching feet. But war was also outside her reach, — war and wisdom, — and now there was something else. She looked at the statue in the corner. She couldn't have worn the girdle of Venus even if she'd had it; it would have been far too large. Venus was smoothly made; Emily, in later years, when she developed a talent for epigram, called herself an animated broomstick. But she had a mind, and the mind may wear much that the body must cast aside.

She picked up the ponderous, leather-covered volume and carried it to its shelf. It was a disagreeable shelf marked 'reference,' and with a further explanation stating that books belonging on it could not be taken out of the library. She had read that explanation many times; it applied to most of the books she liked best. She turned and went back to her seat at the big table, the table to the left; there was another table to the right and two more facing the high windows. Miss Smith's desk was to the extreme left behind a sort of wire fence, and Dr. Guthrie, her honored chief, was still more screened from the vulgar gaze. Dr. Guthrie was a very wise man indeed. Emily Stedman was firm in the belief that he had read all the books in the Hornmouth library. There were books, books, books, right to the ceiling; and there was a little iron balcony halfway to the top which was reached by a little iron stairway. Dr. Guthrie seemed to spend the greater part of his time perched upon this balcony, his skullcap

pushed to the back of his head, his coat tails blown by the breeze from the open window. But at heart he was a calm man. The present touched him but lightly; he dealt with the past; the period of the Punic Wars was his especial province. Dr. Rainor was a doctor of divinity; his especial province was the period of the future. Emily's father, Dr. Stedman, dealt almost exclusively with the present — he was a biologist.

The students of Hornmouth University had the past, present, and future thrust at them in compact, easily digested pellets, and during the process of assimilation they sat at the library tables and took notes. There seemed, Emily thought, to be more notes than students. She never took notes, — but she wasn't a student; she was merely an ugly little girl — at the age of fourteen it was a more aggressive thing than plainness.

The library closed at six. One by one its occupants glanced at the clock, collected their possessions, and went out. Miss Smith at her desk was gathering up some papers. Dr. Guthrie took off his skullcap and put it in his pocket. Emily alone made no movement, and Miss Smith's spectacles had become increasingly intrusive. At last Dr. Guthrie opened his little wicket gate and stepped out. Emily looked up at him, and he met her startled eyes: "Dreamer — dreamer! —"

"Pardon me, Dr. Guthrie, did you speak?"

The doctor turned to Miss Smith. "Miss Smith, did I speak?"

"I don't think so, Doctor."

"You see! —"

Emily rose. "Good night."

This intimate of war and power and wisdom — this worshipper of glory and love — was terribly embarrassed by the presence of Miss Smith and Dr. Guthrie. They had always been merely the wax dolls she had dressed in the elaborate garments of her fancy, the allegorical figures of Wisdom.

“Good night,” she repeated.

“Good night, Miss Emily —”

It was as if the big table were executing a *pas seul*, or the statue of Venus had stepped down from its pedestal.

The sun had set; but the autumn sky was still flushed with it, and the buildings of Hornmouth, with their dull brick walls and slate roofs, were surrounded by a varicolored glory not their own. The new House of Mechanics, brave in white marble and columns, bore a closer resemblance than usual to an Athenian temple. It was a gift from a rich alumnus, and though Hornmouth was becomingly grateful, she was also somewhat disturbingly aware of the contrasting shabbiness of her other architecture. Dr. Rainor called the new House of Mechanics the vanity of the flesh. Emily's father, Dr. Stedman, called it the vanity of the rich alumnus. Emily didn't know what either of them meant, and she didn't care. She supposed the statue of Venus was the vanity of the flesh, and the bright color of the clouds and the sense of the fresh, clear air. The dinner that she was going home to, — the hot, thick soup and cold meat and underdone potatoes, — surely that wasn't the vanity of anything. Neither was her shabby woollen coat. But her coat and her dinner didn't seem to matter; she never thought about them; and it was only the things she thought about which mat-

tered. Hornmouth was given to displays neither of fashion nor of cookery. The coat was warm, and the dinner sustained the body that wore it. Besides, she didn't have to look at them. She could look, instead, at her cousin, Ralph Parrish, who was now coming towards her on horseback. His was the vanity of the flesh and of the world and of the devil.

II

'You hit too often, and you don't think enough. Wait — you've all the time there is. See where you want to hit, and then hit hard. Meanwhile you'll get pounded, you say? What's the use of size and strength if you can't stand being pounded? One smash and the other fellow's down and out — you're a bit sore, that's all.'

A pale young imp, all arms and legs and faded gingham dress, theorizing on the Gentle Art in order that a pair of fledging giants may the better maim each other. Emily Stedman giving a lesson in the art of war. This was better, even, than the shadows cast by a flickering candle. This was life instead of dreams; this was reality, and better — at the moment — than all the wisdom of Hornmouth University.

At the age of fourteen Emily Stedman's opinion on war was eagerly sought. She had a fundamental detachment from it which made her a fairly unbiassed judge. If she herself had been fighting the dreaded boy who lived on the other side of the hedge, how could she have seen the flaws in Ralph Parrish's method of attack? She would have been too much blinded by the dust of battle. Instead, she had sat at the safe distance of the stable-yard gate and hurled

invective — at once derogatory and weird — at the conquering enemy. Her cousin knew how to take his licking. A bloody nose and a nasty cut over one eye, which seemed somehow to get mixed up with his thick, light hair, were only two of many small injuries. But he sustained them all with graceful ease. He listened to Emily's little homily quite as if his handkerchief wasn't increasingly scarlet and a great red drop didn't occasionally splash into the puddle in the road beside him.

"I'm not afraid of being pounded — it isn't that — I can't wait —"

"No, you're always at it."

"Too much; but I'm not afraid —"

"You're afraid without knowing it. You can't help yourself; Derry's fist looks like the biggest thing in sight. But to him yours looks just as big."

Ralph doubled the discussed implement and meditatively regarded it.

"Yours *is* just as big. My Lord! — if I had a fist like that! —"

"What would you do?" Her cousin's curiosity was half-hearted.

"I'd lick Derry within an inch of his soul."

"How?"

"Like this —"

Emily's arm shot out — her thin little hand became a ball of steel. Ralph Parrish staggered under the blow — balanced a moment on the swinging gate — and then fell backwards into the muddy road. That was life, if you like. It might, of course, be death. But if it were Emily wouldn't, just then, have very much cared. She stared

down upon the limp, prostrate figure, curious at what she had done, elated at her own unexpected strength. Her cousin's whole aspect was very vivid to her. His rather large face was white save where it was gory; his loose flannel shirt was torn wide at the neck. At an age when most boys are lean little beasts he had attained a certain splendor of physique — a splendor that stretched wide his thin linen knickerbockers and condoned the exaggerated spread of his mouth. As soon as nature permitted, he covered his mouth with a mustache. It was the only feature he possessed which was not altogether agreeable; it spread too far; it was like a mouth seen through a magnifying glass.

Emily sat there on the top of the gate for some time. There were whole years of time which counted for less. Then Ralph Parrish slowly rose to his feet. Emily wondered, dimly, what he was going to do. She half expected to be felled to the ground. Her triumphant moment seemed over. There he was, tall and strong, and in his dishevelled condition almost sinister. She slid down from the gate. She would put the strength of her theorizing to the proof; she would meet her pupil in open battle; if she could knock him down once, she could do it again. Her arm still tingled with the success of that first blow. Yet with it all — mixed with the joy of the prospective fight — she was terribly afraid; and, unlike her cousin, she was acutely conscious of her fear.

She waited, impatient, on the alert. "Well? —"

"What?"

"Aren't you going to hit back?"

Ralph Parrish looked at her silently. It couldn't have been a very edifying occupation; she wasn't pretty; and

behind the glitter of his slate blue eyes there seemed a sort of latent reflection of her ugliness.

"Aren't you?" she asked again.

"Aren't I what?"

"Going to hit back —"

"Why, no."

She had an inspired moment. "If I were a boy, you'd hit back!"

Ralph Parrish was David singing in the tent of the awakening Saul.

"Yes, but you're not. You're a girl."

Then it was that she came closer yet to life. Ralph picked her up in his arms and kissed her, a kiss strangely mixed with mud and blood and the warmth of conflict.

III

The big hunter's moon was in its last quarter. It balanced on the tip of University Hill — uncertain, almost drunken — and then rose triumphant. The road stretched upward very straight and very white, and a lantern on the Stedman porch flickered and went out. The windows of Dr. Stedman's study cast two patches of yellow light on the dark grass. The doctor himself had gone in there some hours before and locked the door; he had this inhuman way of shutting himself off from the disturbances of the outside world. He carried the inverted eye — the inner life — to an exaggeration. In the place where he now lives the inverted eye has probably found its true orbit. . . .

Dr. Stedman's daughter looked up at her father's house for what she thought would be the last time. In an upper window the shade was drawn down, and she saw through it

the shadow of a figure moving about. It was her mother. How little her mother knew. Emily knew a great deal; she and Ralph Parrish were going to run away. It was an idea born of Emily's desire for life.

The road stretched upward, very white and very empty, and the snapping autumn cold cut sharp; but she turned her collar about her ears; Ralph was waiting for her at the upper railway station. They were going into the unknown — beyond University Hill — beyond the village — even beyond the upper railway station. They were going to Boston, and from Boston they were to take a ship. Emily had never seen the ocean. And then — they frankly didn't know. But there could be a great deal of life between then and now. Even if they were forced to turn back, there would be the memory of this night, with the drunken moon and the cold air and the darkness which didn't prevent the clearness — the memory, not to mention the actuality. Emily had a sense of extreme elation, of an expectation so intense that it verged on fear. It was as if she were possessed of some new power, some added, higher faculty.

She went up the hill, past the college buildings, past the new House of Mechanics, and down through the village. A muffling cloth seemed to be taken away, and familiar objects stood out in unaccustomed bareness. A little white cat scampered across her path, and the church clock startled her with one loud chime. The gravestones stood up straightly like soldiers marching. There were dark doorways and trim, square houses. The moon, hanging in space, was performing marvellous feats of balancing. If she could balance like that! Her legs seemed to act of

their own volition; she became aware that she was running, but she felt no fatigue, and running was one of the many things forbidden her. But she was strong now — stronger than she had ever been in her life before — almost as solid and as splendid as he towards whom she was running. Her mind, her little laboring brain, was fast asleep, taking a great beautiful rest; and her senses — her sense of the wind in her face and of her own new strength — were taking its place. She was beyond the village now. Houses had given way to trees, and in front her path lay through a wide, flat field. The little white cat had been following her, and it dashed past her, a streak of deeper white against the whiteness of the road.

She stopped running. Her blood throbbed up and pounded at her temples. The sound of it drowned the sound of her voice when she tried to call. And then came the soft patter of the cat's returning feet. She called again; she had a sudden horror of being alone. Alone on foot at night we enter that world which is at other times always a little ahead of us; and Emily was very much alone. Besides herself there was the inquiring cat and the swaying road and the drunken, balancing moon. Ralph Parrish came to her across the wide field. He caught her as she fainted dead away.

The upper railway station at Hornmouth was a small, unimportant structure which had outlived its usefulness. The patronage of the Hornmouth traveller had gone over to the other line of road, and the station for that road was in quite an opposite direction. In fact, the upper railway station existed largely by virtue of the inertia which makes it easier to live than to die. But it had its loyal friends

— a select company of people who desired, for reasons best known to themselves, either to leave or arrive at Hornmouth unnoticed. And there was a train which happened to stop there in the very small hours of the morning, a train peculiarly theirs. And they chose their hour well. Moonlight lent to the upper railway station a picturesqueness natively foreign to it, gave it a look like the hut of the wicked witch in the middle of the silver field; it only lacked a wandering prince and princess.

The station-master came out with his lantern. The train stopped. The awakened passengers stared sleepily. And presently, with much grumbling, the train went on again. He of the lantern gave a puzzled glance about, and then went within and shook the fire in his stove to a greater brilliancy. Beyond the edge of the silver field the prince was carrying the princess farther and farther away from the witch's hut and the fiery dragon. They couldn't — even together — face it.

“Ralph —”

“Emily —”

“Am I very heavy?”

“No.”

“Because if I'm heavy, you must set me down.”

“And then — ?”

“And then — what?”

“After I had set you down, what would you do?”

“I think I could walk. Ralph —”

“Yes.”

“I'm sorry I can't go. Some day I may grow stronger. Some day — the ocean — isn't the ocean blue, Ralph, like the sky? And there are little white waves and bubbles

of foam. I'll climb out to the bow of a big ship, and the ocean will pass under me, and I'll have a house built on the edge of a great cliff — a house all my own —"

"And I?"

"I have you without the house, you to carry me. I should much rather carry you. Do you remember the day I knocked you down?"

"That was yesterday."

"That was back — back — ever so far back."

"I don't understand."

They seemed to traverse great distances, the village street was of an interminable length, and all the time the moon balanced with tireless energy. Emily was cold; Ralph took off his coat and wrapped it about her, and she was too weak to resist. It was a slow progress that they made, and became slower still as Ralph's muscles tired of their burden.

"Emily —"

"Ralph —"

"Could you walk now, a few steps?"

"I'll do my best." But the road rose up in front of her, a crooked, swaying mass.

It was under the shadow of the new House of Mechanics that Ralph's strength utterly failed him. They sat down together on the marble steps and watched the first paleness of the sky.

"Ralph —"

"Yes? —"

"Did you ever hear of the girdle of Venus?"

"No —"

"Venus — one of the most celebrated deities of the

ancients — she was sprung from the froth of the sea, Ralph, with the white foam all about her and a little cockle-shell. She had a girdle — a girdle of fire, with red flames. Do you think she'd lend it to me? If I could wear it even once —

“ ‘Spotted snakes with double tongues,
Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen —
Newts and blindworms, do no wrong —
Bow, wow,
The watchdogs bark —
Bow, wow —
Hark, hark! I hear
The strain of strutting chanticleer
Cry cock-a-diddle-dow!’ ”

“That's Shakespeare, Ralph. It isn't just like that in the book; but it's no matter — Shakespeare and Venus — Ralph!”

“Yes?”

“At home they must never know.”

The road was straighter now, very straight and very white, and the moonlight faded in the dawn.

“Ralph, you go first.”

Emily waited, a solitary little figure, half hidden by the broad hedge; and then she went back to her father's house. The lights in Dr. Stedman's study were long since out, and she was unobserved upon the stair.

IV

If wisdom is the knowledge of the minds of men, it is also the knowledge of their bodies; and if there was one thing more than another — more, even, than the new House of

Mechanics — upon which the University of Hornmouth prided herself, it was upon her possession of R. H. Stedman, biologist and professor of biology.

Hornmouth appreciated R. H. Stedman. The outside world didn't wake up to him till after his lamented death. The outside world is still in the act of discovering his greatness. But Hornmouth occupies the enviable position of having known it all along — Hornmouth even considers that she made his greatness possible. She at least gave him a hearth and home without a too great sacrifice of leisure. And her devotion was one of those pure passions which are wholly devoid of self-seeking, for Dr. Stedman wasn't a very good professor. He took no pains to do what is known in pedagogic circles as finding the level of his classes; he even denied that they had a level. He didn't care a straw for the good of the young idea; unlike most biologists, he didn't care a straw for the good of humanity itself. His researches, his discoveries, his marvellous books, were achieved for the good of his own soul; and what was the whole University of Hornmouth, weighed in the balance with Dr. Stedman's soul? But Hornmouth was indulgent. Dr. Stedman was her only luxury.

It was the very concentration of his purpose — the intensity of his egoism — that caused his greatness. He won by sheer force of character — or rather by sheer lack of it. He bent to his own ends his wife and his house and his University. He was a man apart, a being exempt from the ordinary human burdens. He was an immortal mind descended upon the earth to discover the secrets of the less immortal body. What wonder that his path should be made smooth? It was made more than smooth; its smooth-

ness attained to glassiness. But in the midst of all this harmony there was one discordant note,—one flaw,—his daughter. It seemed strange to him that he should have a daughter; he had never somehow regarded himself in that light. And Emily was rather more than an ordinary daughter; she bid very fair to become another immortal mind. There was hardly room in one house for two immortal minds; and the greater part of Dr. Stedman's house was turned into a place in which were discovered the secrets of the less immortal body.

Emily said that her father's study resembled nothing so much as a desert swept by a cyclone. Emily resented her father. She resented his strength. She resented his big, barren room; she failed to understand how any one could spend the greater part of his waking hours there. Apart from the very present question of its ugliness, the place was so relentlessly a workshop. One set aside on its threshold the garments of leisure and pleasure and came in stripped for labor, the hard labor of the mind. She herself would have preferred a softer surrounding—delicate stuffs and small broken spaces; her thoughts took too long journeys with nothing to say them nay; they couldn't stand the strain and pull. The external aspect made a great difference in Emily's thoughts. She had a passion for the thing she called beauty; beauty made her forget her ugliness; beauty was her dream. Her father's dream was differently wooed; her father took for it a different potion. He went into his big room, his desert swept by a cyclone, and locked the door. The sound of the turning key was to him like the first notes of loud music; the very smell that greeted his nostrils—the smell which was not so much

a smell as an absence of all other smells, a sort of atmospheric hollowness — gave him a sense of potential excitement. In his own way Dr. Stedman was a poet; and the big untidy room, with its locked door and its strange smell, was the habitation of his poetry. The desk, the rows of books, the shabby leather chair, the queer metal tables and instruments and the slimy pink things in the sealed glass jars, — all these were to him as the furniture of his own mind.

Dr. Stedman's was the little yellow house just beyond University Hill. It had pea-green shutters and a highly varnished door by which you entered directly into the tiny hall that was forced into use as a sitting-room. Dr. Stedman's niece, Mrs. Parrish, had the much larger house just beyond his; her grounds began at her uncle's back yard. If the new House of Mechanics was beautiful, Mrs. Parrish's grounds were exquisite. There were clipped hedges and gardens and gravel walks, great elms and an old stone sundial. There were spaces of sunlight and spaces of shade — curved benches on which to sit and straight steps on which to stand. And then came the house — big and old and yet gay; little Emily Stedman called it the smile of the father of Pan. Her own house was small and new and yet sad. It had nothing at all to do with Pan. But it wasn't her own; it was her father's. Her father lived in a desert swept by a cyclone, and the little yellow house with the pea-green shutters was outside and apart.

In June the scent of the wet, fresh-cut grass blew in through his windows, and his windows overlooked Mrs. Parrish's grounds. He could rest his strained eyes whenever he chose. When he wearied of nature embryonic, he

could rejoice in the spectacle of nature complete. And on a certain June morning — the one following his daughter's fifteenth birthday — his need of rejoicing was very great.

There had been a little celebration. His wife had procured a cake and candles; and his niece, Mrs. Parrish, together with her son, Ralph, had graced their festive board. Dr. Guthrie, also. . . . It was a strange assemblage for a child's birthday party — the two learned doctors, the quite unlearned niece of one of them, and the boy Ralph — big and blond and rather shy in the presence of his elders. Mrs. Stedman had worn her best gown, and Emily was resplendent in stiff pink muslin. The big student's lamp had been brought in from the sitting room and set on the dining table, which was still further decorated by roses from Mrs. Parrish's garden. Dr. Stedman had felt unwontedly social. He mixed his guests a curious and original drink, and they drank to Emily and to the college year which was drawing to a successful close. "When Hornmouth's year ends," said Dr. Guthrie, "our year begins. When the students of Hornmouth are flocking forth into the gay world — gambling like lambs let out to play — we — we — are shutting our doors against the glorious summer weather, delving among our musty volumes, and piercing the secrets of eternity with our microscopes." The learned doctor paused and refreshed himself with the original drink. "We divide among us the great slain carcass of knowledge, and our vigil is lit by the *ignis fatuus* over the marsh of our exhausted brains. We have wasted our youth," he said, "and we are wasting our age, in pursuit of unpursuable things. But why? Because we must. When the day

comes for us to answer to our good Lord for the use we have made of our sojourn upon this earth, we may say — we may say —”

“My soul! — he’s getting drunk —”

Mrs. Parrish frowned. “Be quiet, Ralph.”

“We may say that for us this earth has been merely as the winding pattern of a Persian carpet — a Persian carpet. We have watched it from an Olympian height. For us nature has been but as so much material for our thought. We are the end of nature, the last word; we are more — we are at once above it and beyond it. We, with our dishevelled aspects, our worn coats, our white mottled skins, we are the end of nature. And you —” Dr. Guthrie turned to Ralph — “you are the beginning. And you, madam,” his excited gaze rested on Mrs. Parrish, “you also are the beginning. We are strange, alien creatures, and you — you are normal — damnably normal!”

There followed a silence which Dr. Stedman’s daughter was the first to break. There she sat, with her pale little face and exaggerated eyes, a creature as alien and as strange as her guest’s most flushed imagination could conjure. “It seems to me,” she said, “that we look at nature from the point of view of father dissecting a rabbit, and they —” she indicated her cousins — “they look at it from the point of view of the rabbit. And isn’t theirs the better way? Don’t they, perhaps, get more out of it?” And then this other strange being, this other immortal mind, had risen from the feast and gone out to play. One of the rabbits, personified by Ralph Parrish, had gone with her. She was really only a little girl.

Dr. Stedman looked about at his big, barren room. In

the glaring morning light the room looked back at him with an uncompromising stare. It was, as Emily said, a desert swept by a cyclone. What Emily said would have to be reckoned with. Last night she had sat in judgment upon him; and his friend, Dr. Guthrie, had made a drunken speech in which all his most sacred ideals were held up to ridicule. Dr. Stedman wondered a little exactly what he had put in that drink. He himself had waked that morning with an unaccustomed feeling in his head. It reminded him of his German student days. Those had been a long time ago. Was it true that he had wasted his life in pursuit of unpursuable things? Was it true, what Emily said, that his niece, Laura Parrish, got more out of life than he did? He had always considered that he got so much. He was seized with a sudden anger against himself and his work.

He opened his windows wider. The scent of the wet, fresh-cut grass cooled his head. Emily was young — Emily could get away, while he . . . He picked up one of the sealed glass jars. The thing fell to pieces in his hand, and its contents slid along the metal table and dropped with a soft flap to the floor. That, he supposed — that soft pink lump — was the unpursuable thing. It was not in pursuit of it, surely, that he had mixed the abominable drink. In pursuit, rather, of the damnably normal. And the damnably normal had given him a headache. And his daughter, who bid so very fair to become another immortal mind, was playing ball with Ralph Parrish. He could see her from his windows. No wonder that Dr. Stedman's need of rejoicing was very great.

CHAPTER II

THE CUCKOO

I

SOME few years ago a woman — probably an American — was wandering about among the shelves and tables of the most noted bookseller in Paris. She was neither very young nor very old, very beautiful nor very ugly; she wasn't even — according to the standards of Americans in Paris — very well dressed. She was rather a tall woman, largely made, and when she spoke her mouth opened to an unexpected length. Her eyes were, perhaps, her most arresting feature; they had a tendency towards prominence, and were of a curious golden color not unlike the deeper yellow of transparent amber. Besides being yellow, they were at the moment slightly bloodshot. The Paris sun was evidently too bright, though from the tone of their possessor's skin it might seem that they had lately been exposed to a sun still more powerful, for the woman who wandered about among the book-shelves was deeply tanned. In April that is in the north the flag of wealth and leisure; she of the golden eyes was golden in other respects also, or the fortunate owner of golden friends.

Her companion made up in elaboration of costume what she lacked. Her companion was not an American. It is only a Frenchman who can wear a frock-coat in the morn-

ing without suggesting either politics or weddings. Politics the Duke de Clopin had always managed to avoid; with weddings he had not been so successful. The lady with whom he had come to the book-shop, though not his wife, was his wife's very intimate friend. She addressed him in English. She had a slow method of speech, the outcome of a successful battle with the Western burr, and also of the habit of conversing with those to whom English was a foreign tongue. "I see nothing that Lilla would like — nothing."

"Is there nothing? A little book of verse — a story —" The duke answered her in French, and it was in that language that their talk went on.

She was turning pages bound in yellow paper. "They are all the same, the seven deadly sins and an attempt at wit. The tastes of maids and lackeys plus the talent to express them."

"True, true. I remain faithful to my Hugo and my Maupassant — this clatter of voices that should be still is too much. But is there not anything which you yourself could use? That book under your hand —"

"You forget that I have a daughter, a big girl of seventeen, who pops her nose into everything."

"But she is with the good sisters at the convent."

"The good sisters at the convent can't keep her always. There are moments — breathless moments — when she is with me. And I more and more see that as the years go on, she'll be more than a daughter; she'll be a problem, a great, tall, beautiful problem."

"Ah — but she will marry!"

"Without money, Maurice, and without position — a

little stray American. Whom, may I ask, will she marry?" The mother put it to him without hope.

"With you for a mother she will marry any one she pleases — any one you please."

The lady thus complimented made an untranslatable exclamation.

"Oh, but she will!" the duke insisted.

"She isn't like me, you know. She has the fatal gift of beauty."

"And you?"

"Ah — I have other qualities than beauty; qualities which my daughter unfortunately lacks."

The duke was staring out at the lively Paris street. "You have qualities which all other women lack. You know what you have, better than I can tell it. You could do anything, anything you would. An immortal descended among us —"

The joke was too good; it was a very perceptible moment before the immortal emerged from her laughter. "And yet I have remained a widow for ten long years! How is it, then, that it will be so easy for me to marry my daughter if I myself —"

Her companion smiled into the curled depths of his beard. "You have been true to the memory of your husband."

"Inconsolable?"

"Inconsolable."

She looked at him. "It's too bad!"

He met her look with all seriousness. "Yes. Mistaken loyalty."

This had the effect of sending her across the shop.

"And all this time we haven't found a book for Lilla! Lilla told me that she was endeavoring to improve her English; I wonder if any of these —" She had stopped before a table on which were displayed some works in her native language.

The clerk, who had left them, now came back. "Here is a book which is being much talked of in America. If Madame is an American, she has doubtless heard of it."

"I am choosing some books for Madame la Duchesse, who is not an American; but what is this book?"

The clerk held out a slim volume in a showy, scarlet binding. "'The Cuckoo —'"

"Ah, 'The Cuckoo,' — I like the name. Do you think that Lilla would like it?"

"The name?"

"No, the book."

The Duke de Clopin pondered. "It is not for me to say. But if you like it, let us take it to Lilla, and on our own heads be it if we do not make a success." He turned to the clerk. "What do they say of it in America?"

"They say it is at once the most daring and the most realistic thing that has appeared in years. If Madame —"

Madame cut him short. "The seven deadly sins again — and in one little volume! Well, I'll take it." She glanced down over the duke's shoulder at the title-page. "'The Cuckoo,' by Emily Stedman. And who, may I ask, is Emily Stedman?"

II

That question, the one put to the Duke de Clopin in the Paris book-shop, was asked with increasing frequency.

Asked and not answered. The personality of Emily Stedman was shrouded in mystery. A rumor was afloat that the author of "The Cuckoo" was a man—a prominent clergyman who concealed both his sex and his identity under a clever pseudonym. The prominent clergyman came out with a vigorous denial; "The Cuckoo" wasn't at all a religious bird—rather the reverse. And then the question was answered once for all by a photograph which appeared in one of the better literary journals. It was of Emily Stedman, and represented a slender little woman of some thirty years with smoothly brushed hair and tight, stiff clothes. The eyes alone redeemed it. In fact, the eyes were so conspicuous—at once so brilliant and so large, and so set in darkness—that had it not been for Miss Stedman's obvious simplicity, one might have thought them painted. The photograph was unaccompanied by text; but its name sufficed, and the prominent clergyman breathed a sigh of relief. He valued his reputation as a moral teacher; he felt it fragile and in jeopardy.

The publishers of "The Cuckoo" thanked their new author for the loan of her photograph. They suggested that an interview might prove commercially valuable. "In these days personality is the great asset. The public likes to know what its favorites eat for breakfast and when they get up and go to bed. 'The Cuckoo' has hit the bull's-eye of popular success, and we want it to stay there." They wrote to their new author at her native town of Hornmouth and received a reply to the effect that an objection to publicity was of course unfair to them. Miss Stedman's publishers were intimate friends of the *New York Star's* managing editor. A representative of that paper was sent to

Hornmouth without delay. An interview with the author of "The Cuckoo" was news — important news.

The *Star's* representative arrived at Hornmouth in the afternoon. He had come all the way from New York to Boston and from Boston to Hornmouth, and it was early summer and a Saturday at that; and he had expected a holiday. Instead, he found himself at what seemed to his heated vision the uttermost end of the earth with a task before him which could prove nothing but dull. He thought regretfully of his lost holiday; he and his young wife had planned it together. He himself aspired to the hand of the Muse, but he himself had as yet dismally failed. Journalism — he pondered. He was forced to make his living by journalism. He was at the beck and call of Redding, the managing editor, and of Keene, the city editor; and he felt himself a better man than they. And now he was to add a feather to the laden cap of Emily Stedman. Who was she, a little New England old maid, to have written the sensational book of the year? — while he . . . Her house was a longer distance from the station than he had supposed; the sun was hot, and he had eaten a heavy lunch on the train. He mopped his perspiring brow and flicked the dust from his shoes. That must be the house of genius — the little yellow house with the green blinds.

The representative of the *Star* rang the bell. After some delay the door was opened by an untidy elderly person, who seemed uncertain concerning Miss Stedman's whereabouts. "She may be in and she may not. I guess if she is, she's busy, and if she isn't —" The elderly person paused.

"Will you kindly take her my card? I think that she's expecting me."

The elderly person let him in at this, and he wandered about the tiny sitting-room while she went off to find Miss Stedman. The place was in great disorder; a trunk stood in the middle of the floor, gaping its contents, a worn horse-hair sofa was pushed crookedly against the wall, and a mass of books and papers covered a small table. The elderly person came back. Miss Stedman would see him.

He was guided through a little passageway into a large, dim room, which he thought at first to be empty. Fresh from the bright summer light, he was unaccustomed to dimness. He waited a moment, and then he became aware that there were two people in the room, a man who was sitting on a wide bench in the farthest corner and a woman who stood with her back to him looking out through the drawn curtains of a big window. The man rose to his feet. "Well, Emily, I must be going. I'll see you later."

"Yes, I'll see you later."

Emily turned about and looked at Ralph Parrish with cold eyes. The representative of the *New York Star* was coming towards her across the wide, bare floor. To her he was also the representative of success. She cared a great deal about success — tangible, solid success. To gain it she had taken the thing she cared about — her ability to create — and forced it into a misshapen bottle. She had written "The Cuckoo" not because it pleased her, but because she thought that it would please the public; and the representative of the *Star* was a proof that she had been correct. Now she could write anything she pleased — go anywhere

she pleased. The *Star* might have saved the expense of a journey. Miss Stedman was moving to New York the following week. Royalties were pouring in in a thickening stream. It was one of the cases where the end justifies the means.

Ralph Parrish paused in the doorway. "We dine at seven. You won't be late?"

He still had a tendency to linger, and when he had finally left Emily felt forced to answer the reportorial glance. "My cousin, Mr. Parrish. His mother lives in the big house next to this, and I happen to be dining with her to-night." It seemed amusing that her first step as a public character should be an explanation of Ralph Parrish. He had always in some way been concerned with her first steps.

There was a moment of silence — almost embarrassment — and the journalistic habit rose to the top. "Is this room, this room that we're in now, where you do your work?"

"Yes. It used to be my father's study."

"Is your father a writer?"

"My father was a biologist. He wrote, of course. He died two years ago."

There was the conventional murmur of regret. "And your mother?"

"She died two years before my father."

"You live alone?"

"Practically that. I move to New York next week. I'm going to take a little flat — a little flat all my own."

"But isn't this house your own?"

"In a sense, of course. But I prefer to start afresh. For what else did I write 'The Cuckoo'?"

The young man stared. "Isn't writing 'The Cuckoo' a curious way of starting afresh?" He was becoming accustomed to the dim light, and he saw Emily Stedman quite vividly now. It was true, what Redding had said, that it was a good chance for a story. On one side "The Cuckoo" — sensational — glaring — scarlet-bound; on the other, Emily Stedman, with smooth hair and sharp, pale features. As in the photograph, the eyes were the original touch — the thing that differentiated her from other pale ladies living alone in New England towns. And the tall, blond young man with the obviously metropolitan clothes was a sort of cousin which the usual spinster didn't have at her beck and call. The representative of the *Star* saw in the story he had been sent to obtain the possibilities of real art. If he could get the atmosphere of Miss Stedman's house — the shabby, weather-stained, little yellow house which surprisingly contained this great, dim room with dark-curtained windows and massive furniture. . .

"You have exquisite things," he ventured.

"One or two — yes."

"This room is just as your father left it?"

"No, with him it was quite bare — arranged for his biology with metal tables and that sort of thing. My cousin, Mrs. Parrish, gave me all this. She knows I care about having things I like — she knows how much it really matters to me. In certain chairs I feel insignificant; in certain rooms I feel altogether wrong; but here I've managed with her help. . . Why, in that chair over there," Miss Stedman pointed — "the big one with the carvings, I feel myself quite splendid!"

"You feel in yourself a change?"

"Yes. But I mustn't talk about myself."

"Yourself, I assure you, is the very thing I'm here to make you talk about."

"It's an intimate personal sketch that you're after — the sort of thing that my work can't give?"

Redding had said something of that nature. The words, intimate and personal, always fell easily from his lips; but Redding's ambassador was unprepared to be so soon discovered. "You've always lived at Hornmouth?"

"Always."

"Then, of course, you've been to college here?"

"No, I've never been to college."

"Now, that's interesting, — the daughter of a scientific man who's lived all her life in a college town and hasn't been herself to college. Perhaps you don't believe in the higher education of woman?"

"It's the very thing that I believe in most."

"Yet in 'The Cuckoo' you make it out a failure."

"Oh, in 'The Cuckoo' I make everything out a failure!"

"I don't think you at all realize what a sensation your book has created. It's *the* sensation of the hour. You've done what we're all striving for — it's extraordinary — extraordinary."

Miss Stedman smiled. "It *is* rather extraordinary, isn't it? I think it's because I came at it from the outside."

"The outside?" The inquirer was in darkness.

"Besides, 'The Cuckoo' was written with a purpose."

"Really? Why, I thought it singularly without a moral lesson."

"It at least pays my railroad fare away from Hornmouth; and isn't that a purpose?"

The representative of the *New York Star* found Miss Stedman herself quite as extraordinary as the fact of her having written "The Cuckoo."

III

"The Cuckoo" did rather more than pay Miss Stedman's railway fare from Hornmouth. She, who for her luxuries had feasted on the crumbs which fell from the moderately stocked table of the Parrishes, and for her necessities had depended on the scant income of a college professor, now found herself, at least according to the standards of the place she was leaving, a woman of wealth. Yet she wasn't unduly elated. She had merely done the thing which she had set out to do, and this didn't strike her as rare. Two years before she had stood at her father's grave and watched the dark, rain-soaked earth being thrown over the coffin. It had rained, she remembered, for many days, and her new, cheap mourning was splashed with mud. Her black gloves were sticky with moisture, and the tails of the undertaker's horses drooped. She had turned away with a fierce determination. Tears, not of grief, but of excitement came into her eyes. She had gone back to the little yellow house and with her own tired hands cleared away the rows of books, the metal tables, the queer pink contents of the glass jars. She brushed the mud from her new clothes and folded them away. The next day "The Cuckoo" was begun.

It was not her first book. There had been another, "The Blind Alley," blind in more ways than one; and two or three inarticulate masses, — as inarticulate as the contents of the glass jars, — ideas worked at beyond all hope of clearness

or abandoned in mid-ocean at the call of another vessel. And then came the glaring, flagrant "Cuckoo," the book written with a purpose. "The Cuckoo" was the essence — consciously extracted — of Emily Stedman's vulgarity.

Dr. Guthrie, the librarian of Hornmouth, had once called her a dreamer. There are dreamers whose dreams are of the past and dreamers whose dreams are of the future. Emily never considered that she had a past to dream about. But every one, even a man on the eve of being hanged, has at least the possibility of a future. At fourteen Emily's future was all before her; at thirty it was still the thing she thought about — the thing which mattered. Hers was the creative as distinguished from the historical mind. It was the undiscovered country that was to her the country of romance, the book she hadn't read that seemed alive, the place she hadn't been to that was fraught with memories. She left Hornmouth, the place she'd been to all her life, without a single look back. For her it was as done for as a scientific manual which has outlived its period. She said good-by to Miss Smith, whose spectacles contained a more magnifying lens than when she had first noticed them; and to Dr. Guthrie, whose skullcap now served a purpose other than ornamental. She observed that the professors at Hornmouth seemed to grow older with the years and the students younger. The new House of Mechanics had surrendered its claim of newness to a still more glittering structure, and the upper railroad station had been done away with altogether. But, nevertheless, the Hornmouth that at the age of thirty Emily bade a perfunctory farewell to was very much the same Hornmouth she had attempted to leave at the age of fourteen without

any farewell at all. And she herself was surprisingly unchanged.

She leaned back luxuriously in the upholstered seat of her Pullman car. She was getting nearer and nearer to the undiscovered country — farther and farther from the one whence she had come. In an hour she would be in Boston, and after Boston, New York. She had been to Boston before. She knew its crowded, wavering streets and vine-covered houses. It always seemed to her merely a sort of glorified Hornmouth, a Hornmouth suddenly waked one morning to find itself the possessor of theatres and shops and great noisy railways. She had never been to New York. She was glad now that she hadn't; it would burst upon her with a full freshness of impression. Her projected vision of it was of a place altogether gorgeous, — a city of towering buildings and wide, smooth streets, — a vortex of perpetual motion revolving in a strangely mingled glare of sunlight and electricity. It was the vision she had solidified in "The Cuckoo."

She watched the sunlight flickering on the gayly patterned carpet. It was a carpet brave in reds and greens and it clashed vigorously with the polished woodwork. The stiff plush curtains made still another note of color. And not content with that, there was an ornate decoration of inlaid yellow which appeared at well-chosen intervals as a sort of frieze. The whole car was as hideous as ill-guided ingenuity could make it, and yet the worshipper of beauty liked it — perhaps she went back to the original intention of the designer, which was undoubtedly to convey a sense of abounding luxury. She'd had little enough of luxury in the past, and the gay colors and polished woods sym-

bolized that future which was all before her. She felt herself rushing in barbaric splendor through the austere New England landscape. The very vibration of the motion gave her pleasure; yet any one placed in such a way that they could not see her widely staring eyes might have thought that she was dozing. She might have been suffering from the reaction following some high emotion; and her black clothes — the same which she had so forehandedly folded away two years before — would have seemed to make this latter assumption more than possible. She was, in a sense, fresh from the presence of death. For her, Hornmouth was death, and the rushing train and the undiscovered country towards which it was taking her was the reverse side of the medal.

Opposite her were two boys, Hornmouth students of the newer type — fresh-faced lads whose pursuit of knowledge sat upon them but lightly. It was plain from their talk that they also were bound for New York. They discussed at some length the error of having spent a dollar on their Pullman seats. A dollar in New York would appear to bring larger returns. It seemed to be a city of perpetual joy, and over this joy there reigned a lady of their unmistakably intimate acquaintance by the name of Anna. Anna was apprised of their coming and would be waiting for them with outstretched arms. There was another lady named Alexandra — but no — Alexandra was the name of a theatre — a theatre where Anna sang. Anna's singing was something which the whole town sat up for; Anna made it sit up. Miss Stedman couldn't understand why Anna didn't sing at an earlier hour. This lack of comprehension from the author of "The Cuckoo"!

The author of "The Cuckoo" liked youth — youth in the abstract. Youth closer than that was sometimes disappointing. But these boys were not closer than the other side of the aisle, and their talk — financial and theatrical — amused her. She wondered a little at the vastness of their experience. Birds of such plumage had no need of the enlightenment of an institution of learning. Its chief use, they seemed to think, was the chance it offered for saving money to spend in the city of joy. And then, again a mention of the dollar wasted on their Pullman seats. There was another dollar, irretrievably gone, though not, from their talk, quite wasted. One of them had bought a book which he said that the other could not appreciate. This statement was productive of argument. Their listener heard her father's name. Was it biology they were discussing? They were strangely going to ask Anna's opinion. Anna was evidently a lady of versatility. Again the name, Stedman. It was too much — Miss Stedman turned her head. There was a sudden quiet, and two young men who hadn't, for all their wisdom, forgotten how to blush.

"By George! That's her! —"

In the excitement of the moment, grammar was unrespected.

Emily Stedman wondered if this were fame. It was fame not sufficiently abstract. She had taken the thing she cared about and thrown it upon the world twisted and misshapen, and she now surprised the world in the act of receiving it. Her eyes met the eyes of the two boys. Her embarrassment rose to theirs. She felt herself, with her pale little face and straight black dress, inadequate to the situation. She should have been clothed in scarlet like her

book. As the author of "The Cuckoo" she was an object to excite mirth.

IV

All day heat had held the city in its grasp. It was the strong, unworn heat of early June, and the city could do nothing but limply wait to be released. A little before sundown there was thunder and lightning and straight, cool rain, and then a clearing wind. Mopping handkerchiefs came down from perspiring brows; wilting collars straightened to almost their former stiffness; horses lifted their tired heads and trotted out briskly; the clanging bell of an electric car sounded shrilly on the freshened air. There was a banging of doors and a craning of necks out of windows. Everywhere the city stretched its cramped muscles and went on at quickened stride. Even the great, puffing trains that rumbled their way out from the Grand Central Station seemed to puff and rumble with a greater energy. The station itself was clogged with humanity; the wide mosaic floor trod and retrod by thousands of feet. Men and women and children came in and out of the constantly swinging glass doors. Everywhere there was a sense of hurry and of noise. It was as if the heat and the storm had galvanized the city, and it had rushed, on the new power of its wings, to the Grand Central Station.

But Ralph Parrish hadn't rushed. He had come there very deliberately for the purpose of meeting his cousin. Her train was late. He waited. It was the merest luck, his being in New York. He lived there, it is true, but he was the kind of young man whose habitation is simply his base of supplies. It would seem almost as though he lived in a

place very much as some people marry — to have it off his mind. Distances didn't exist for him. Paris, Russia, even Hornmouth, were equally within his range. And his occupation favored his nomadic tendencies; he was connected with the tanning of pelts — he was the junior partner in a firm of wholesale fur dealers. He had no hand in the actual trapping of the animals, neither did he stand behind a counter and sell the finished product; but he filled one of the intermediate niches of the industry exceedingly well. He filled everything well — one couldn't conceive that he ever might do anything else.

Nature, in the excitement of working in the large — in the unaccustomed thrill of a profusion of magnificent materials — had, with Ralph Parrish, bungled a little the details. To say that he was handsomer at first glance than at second, seems, to one who hasn't had the wonderful privilege of that first glance, to be damning with faint praise. Without being in the least effeminate, he had a sort of beauty which is more often possessed by women than by men — a beauty which benumbs (fortunately) all faculty of criticism. It could no more be analyzed than could be given, after an icy plunge, the exact temperature of the water. His very lack of finish — absence of detail — might easily be mistaken for ruggedness and strength. It saved him from the slightest aspect of indecision. He had gone through all the stages of youth with colors flying; he had been a beautiful baby, a superb child, a splendid boy, and he now was a man that most men and all women turned to look at. His thirty years of life merely intensified and made more clear the fact of his being an extraordinary start.

Parrish waited for his cousin in that part of the station called the concourse, the half-enclosed, cagelike structure where the trains come in and out. He succeeded in standing a little apart — a little out of the way of the rushing stream of humanity. Humanity in the mass bored him; many things bored him; one of the reasons that he liked his cousin, one of the reasons that he was waiting for her now, was that she never bored him. She always had for him a quality of surprise; she affected him very much as the thunderstorm affected the wilted city — she quickened his heavy pulse. Though at the comparison of herself to a thunderstorm, little Emily Stedman would have been the first to laugh. It may have been the reason of his coolness and freshness — his attitude of aloofness. He had within him the possibility of so much action, and half the time he didn't bother with it. The people were rare who, like Emily, had seen him bloodstained and mudstreaked — hot from battle.

He took out his watch. Twenty minutes late, the guard had told him, and it was past that now. He grew impatient. He stood back of the waiting people, his head raised above theirs. The great iron gate slid wide. The train at last, thank heaven, was in! A slow procession came up the long platform, and he scanned it for a little woman in black. But there were many little women in black; smallness and blackness seemed the rule. During his search his eye was caught by an object which obviously wouldn't assist it. It was an object — he couldn't at the moment class it more exactly — which seemed to emanate from the high crown of a lady's hat. It was moving up the platform rather behind the rest of the procession, and in color was like an

Irishman's flag on St. Patrick's Day. Parrish had it now, — it was a feather, — a green feather set at an angle defying all the laws of gravity. He still vainly searched for the little woman in black; but none suited him, and out of so many he surely might have chosen. The green feather was lost to sight. His attention was again diverted from his true quest. But no, the green feather had appeared again as aggressive as ever, and nearer. It had come to a stop before him. The hat it arose from so bravely was worn by his cousin.

"Well, Ralph, don't you know me?"

"My dearest Emmy!"

The hat itself was a marvel. The hair beneath it was even more bewildering. A storm of puffs and curls caught and moulded in blackened bronze. And then the sharp white face with the exaggerated eyes and the slim figure in the plain black dress.

"You're late."

"Am I? I found that in Boston I had two hours to spare."

"Is Boston the origin of that?"

"That?"

"The new gorgeousness."

"Yes; do you like it?"

"It takes away from the lovely appearance of virtue which your company usually lends one." Parrish burst out into loud, faunlike laughter. "Now one will have to expiate one's sins in some other way."

"Isn't my company expiation enough, even with gorgeousness? Oh, Ralph, Ralph, it's good to be here, and it's good to be with you —"

There was a question of Emily's hotel, quiet, as best suited a lady alone. Ralph would escort her there; but they would dine first.

Emily's first view of New York was the usual one from the steps of the station. Except to native New Yorkers it's either that, usually, or the view from the harbor; and Emily, in her intense appreciation, had no regret for the more picturesque prelude. The dusk of the long summer's afternoon was fading into night, and lights were beginning to gleam out in rows and circles and patches. Yet it wasn't a glare of electricity — Emily noticed that. The wide street gave an effect of dimness, and the soft, fresh smell which the storm had left might almost have been the smell of rain-soaked earth. She had a sense of never having been so close to nature. It was nature in a new aspect.

They dined in a place of marble and gold. It was much more the New York of "The Cuckoo" than was the dim, wide street they had left; and even here she felt that "The Cuckoo" hadn't quite hit it off. Her projected vision had gone wide of the mark — it moved on jerking wires. They drove to her hotel, and passed on the way the two Hornmouth boys, also driving. With them was an elaborate young woman who might have been Anna. Emily recognized them and felt less a stranger. The city was holding out kindly, welcoming arms to her; and later, alone in her hotel, with her bag unpacked and her body cleansed of the dust of travel, her gratitude verged on the sentimental. She was a visionary, — a sentimentalist of the future, — and to her the only true home-coming was into a new place. There she was, up twelve stories in the air in a

room of flowered paper and mahogany; and on her bed was tossed a vivid green hat. It returned her contemplative gaze, unblinking. As it lay there with the curling feather it resembled a bird of strange plumage. The resemblance moved the author of "The Cuckoo" to a rather lonely hilarity.

CHAPTER III

VENUS ANADYOMENE

I

THE Duke de Clopin lay in his berth looking out at the blue disk of ocean presented by his port-hole. It was a bright blue, and with a movement in its brightness which suggested both sun and wind. Sometimes the paler blue of the sky would descend and slice away the upper half of this disk of ocean, and sometimes a white sail would destroy it altogether. The duke was conscious of a gentle rocking like the motion of a ship at anchor in a breeze. And it gradually dawned on his awakening reason that as a matter of fact the *Jungfrau* was at anchor. Her captain had told him only the day before that at Larnaca in the island of Cyprus they were to stop for coal. The *Jungfrau* needed that commodity with startling frequency, but the duke was not a man groaning under a weight of bills. His wife was one of the richest women in France. The marriage of Lilla Rothelieu and Maurice, Duke de Clopin, almost attained the dignity of an alliance. But Lilla was not proud; she was fond of her husband, adored her yacht, and worshipped at the feet of her American friend, Mrs. Dench.

In this last she was not alone. Mrs. Dench was the woman, neither very young nor very old, very beautiful nor very ugly, who had ended a rather protracted visit to a

book-shop by purchasing "The Cuckoo." Her husband, Christopher Dench, had been in the diplomatic service; and since his death his widow had more than kept up with the high powers of the land. She was one of the lesser marvels of civilized Europe, and no one could have told you why. The Duchess de Clopin worshipped at her feet: the duchess was aware in herself of certain indecisions, certain lacks; her wealth and rank had the strange effect of making her almost painfully modest; she felt herself born to a conspicuousness to which she was inadequate; and Mrs. Dench, who had been born to nothing, would have been so adequate to a conspicuousness the most exalted. Yet she was neither young nor beautiful, and the length of her mouth always surprised one afresh. The *Jungfrau* rarely made a voyage without her. No one, so the duchess said, could so quiet the many nerves of Mme. Rostov, no one could so amuse the Princess Karina, and surely no one could manage the gentlemen of the party with so competent a hand. The duke shared his wife's admiration. Some people went so far as to say that it was his wife who, like a good wife, shared his. But people said very little about Mrs. Dench, considering her happy gift for conspicuousness. Perhaps it was just that — she was so constantly on view that they didn't have the opportunity.

The duke put out his hand and touched an electric button at the side of his berth. He touched it twice. That was a signal for his breakfast to be brought to him. Formerly he had breakfasted on deck. That morning hour, the shining, brass-trimmed deck, the little racing waves and the smooth tropic sky, — and no one to disturb his peace in these, — had nerved him for the long day. He often won-

dered why the day seemed so long and that hour so short. And then the precious hour had been spoiled — ruined — desecrated — by a tall young woman who gazed at the duke, the ocean and the sky with an equal gravity. She was Mrs. Dench's daughter, and the duke gave up his hour and breakfasted in his stateroom. Mrs. Dench had once called her daughter a problem; that was well and good, the duke thought, but it was unnecessary that she make a problem of other people. He refused to be analyzed and judged. Emily Stedman found the young gay. The duke found them grave.

"And I'm not sure," he had said to Mrs. Dench, "that they are not nearer to the eternal verities than we. Laughter is, after all, merely our recognition of the absurdities of fate. A creature like your daughter, — dewy with innocence, — what does she know of the absurdities of fate? She regards us all as miserable sinners; she judges us by her own exquisite standards —"

"I'm afraid you make my daughter out a prig!"

"Ah — no —"

"Well, even if you did, I would see what you meant. I can't begin to apologize enough for having forced her upon you; but it resolved itself into a question of her coming or my not coming. The nuns tell me they have taught her everything they know; there is no reason for her being with them longer, and schools I mistrust. But really she doesn't bother, does she? She is quite content to sit by herself, and she goes to bed early."

"Bother!" The duke was horrified. "She gives to us a distinction which even the princess can't give. But have the nuns really taught her everything they know?"

Was that the only reason, dear lady? Between friends there should be absolute frankness. I thought that perhaps the presence here of young Gadillon might have something —”

“I thought of that; but Jane won’t look at him. She thinks he’s vile — unspeakable; she finds an obstacle in Mme. Rostov, as if there were not always a Mme. Rostov. What is a poor mother to do with a penniless daughter who has views? I think that some day I shall take her back to America — to Ohio.”

“Ohio? ”

“Yes; I once lived in Ohio. I believe I was born there.”

“And Jane?”

“Oh, Jane was born in Vienna. There’s the absurdity of fate, if you like.”

“Jane is still young.”

“She will recover from that.”

“And she has beauty.”

“Yes, she’s decorative enough. She ought to be on a ceiling or a fresco or in a church — somewhere where she would have no other work in life but to look out upon a passing world with those big, grave eyes of hers.”

“But she does that as it is.”

“Ah — you don’t know Jane! She has views. I’m always expecting her to do something wholly weird — join the Salvation Army — something like that. As it is, she brings in stray cats and dogs. In Paris last spring our rooms were overrun with them; I had to put a stop to it, — the proprietor complained. I do not know which would be worse, stray animals or the Salvation Army. Imagine me with a daughter in the Salvation Army!”

The duke, imprisoned in his stateroom, amused himself while he breakfasted by recalling this talk with Mrs. Dench. Talks with Mrs. Dench were always worthy of recall. And the daughter evidently lacked humor. He imagined her now with her grave gaze bent upon Cyprus. Cyprus was out of the duke's range of vision; his stateroom faced the open sea. The name had a certain music, — Cyprus — Cyprus, — he repeated it over to himself. It was supposed by the ancients to be the birthplace of Venus. He toyed with the supposition. He remembered a picture at the spring Salon of a large woman who balanced with surprising firmness on the crest of a wave and smiled fixedly at a bewitched fisherman. It was called "*La Naissance de Venus*," but suggested, rather, the birth of a new era at bathing resorts. The true birth of Venus, thought the duke, is in our own souls. But the old myth had a charm. He mused for a space on the personality of the goddess . . . Neither very young nor very old, he imagined her, and with a beauty of such an original sort that it was — more than beauty — a great vital force. The duke admired sheer physical strength. He lay back among his pillows, and his thin-lidded eyes closed. Venus would arise from the sea, parting the waters on either side — the island of Cyprus — the blue water on either side . . .

There was the loud sound of shouting. It grew more insistent — a babble of tongues. The voice of Mrs. Dench and the ascendant present rose clear above the phantom voices of the duke's dream. Mrs. Dench was standing in the narrow passageway between the staterooms and talking to some one within. She was in a condition of high excitement.

"There's an enormous white yacht —" she rolled the 'r' richly — "enormous — and she's flying the American flag!"

Truly, the voice of the ascendant present.

II

"If you knew how bored I was, if you knew how unspeakably bored I was, you would not hesitate to send for the people on the big white yacht." The Princess Karina turned to her hostess: "If they were not Americans, I would not ask it; but Americans are always respectable — always — and always amusing. Dear Lilla, you must send for them; I ask it. Mme. Rostov and I are bored to distraction. Are you not bored, Mme. Rostov? No? — Well, you are young; you have a man, you always have a man — last winter it was that young American man, so very handsome, M. Parrish. Now it is M. Gadillon — always some one. But I have no man; I am old and ugly and not even rich. I must be constantly amused. I can make people amuse me — yes, I can at least do that. Ah, you think I am a rude old woman, saying I am bored on your beautiful ship, and the sea air so good for me!"

In her day the Princess Karina herself was beautiful. That day was past. In her day the fact of her rank was the least important fact about her. That day was also past. In her day, besides beauty, she had wit and grace and distinction. Her wit had curdled, her grace had fled, but her distinction had, if anything, increased. As she sat in her low wicker chair, with a background of sea and sky and all around her gayety, and at least a semblance of youth, she gave an impression of extreme age — age so ruthless

and so appalling that it didn't at all suggest the passivity of approaching death. She came from a hard soil, — a harder soil than those about her, — and she made no compromise with time. Her black wig rivalled the raven's wing to which her hair had formerly been compared; her cheek, of the tone of dried leather, was firmly touched with vermilion. The effect produced was that of a warring Indian.

Mme. Rostov turned her lovely head and looked out to sea. On one side of her sat the princess, on the other M. Gadillon; that was compromise in its purest essence. Compromise, to Mme. Rostov, was as the breath of her nostrils. She compromised with her dressmaker and with M. Gadillon; she even — unlike the princess — compromised with time. Her hair, her color, her figure, were a succession of compromises. She finally turned from the sea and let her charming eyes rest full upon the princess. "It is as you say — the yacht is very big and very white, but for myself I am content."

"I am sorry that I cannot be content in your contentment."

The princess's temper was never of the best; but to-day she felt the heat, which seemed to rise in spirals from the water. On the *Jungfrau's* awninged deck powerful mechanical fans stirred the warm air to a breeze; but the wind of the early morning had died, and the ocean itself was as still as a painted drop scene at the theatre. The big white yacht with the American flag swung her bow a little, almost as slowly as the hour-hand of a clock. The sails of the queer foreign ships hung flat.

Mme. Rostov threw back the heaviest of her white veils. "Well, what does Lilla say?"

"Lilla has nothing to say."

Their conversation was carried on in French in deference to this last-named lady, and it was still in her native tongue that she presently addressed them: "I shall write a note at once, and they shall all come to lunch. Whoever is on that yacht will have the opportunity of coming, and I shall make use of the princess's name."

She rose; but Mrs. Dench was on her feet simultaneously. "Ah — stay where you are — let me write the note. I will say that you and the princess desire their presence — they can't refuse — and it will be in English — in English — " She was gone, through the cabin door.

The duchess stared after her. "Is she not a wonderful woman? Jeanne! Jeanne! Come here, Jeanne! How does it seem to have a mother like that?"

Jane Dench didn't respond. She was out of range of the duchess's sharp French voice. In fact, if she hadn't been so far off, it might have been said of her that she had deliberately turned her back on the assembled company. She was reading. And she gave to her book a concentration of attention which raised the little scarlet-bound volume lying in her lap nearly to the importance of the crystal ball upon which the Eastern mystic focusses his thoughts. She gave herself to the full luxury of solitude. The duke, Lilla, the princess, Mme. Rostov, M. Gadillon; the three or four men of indeterminate age, nationality, and occupation who shed upon the *Jungfrau* the light of their completing presences, all did rather more than bore her. As Mrs. Dench had said, what was a poor mother to do with a penniless daughter who had views? Complete, incontestable ugliness would have been preferable; but Jane Dench

wasn't ugly, though she still had about her a little of the abrupt awkwardness of youth. She leaned far back in her steamer chair, and there was something almost boyish in the bent knee, the long, sharp angles of the body.

"Jeanne! — Jeanne! —" the duchess persisted.

At last she was heard. Jane unfolded herself from the complications of her chair, and came forward. "Madame, a thousand pardons — you were calling me?" There was surely nothing abrupt in her manner. It had, on the contrary, a kind of gentleness.

"Yes, Jeanne, I was calling you."

There was a silence during which Jane stood looking down at her hostess and including in her grave, expectant gaze her hostess's guests. She was as strange — as out of key with her surroundings — as was the Princess Karina. Lilla hesitated an instant longer. "I was going to ask you a foolish question, Jeanne, but I think better of it. It was really the pleasure of your company that I desired. Tell me, what is your book?"

Jane laughed. "Oh, it's not mine, it's yours! Mother advised me not to read it, and I wasn't reading it. But a book near by makes one feel busier — thinking, by itself, is such a fearful waste of time."

One of the completing men became interrogative. "What do you think about, mademoiselle? What are the thoughts of a young girl? Ah — if I but knew them! —"

"What do I think about? — To-day I was thinking about the little brown men in the boats."

"Are they so fascinating?"

"No, they're dreadful; but it's just because they're dreadful —"

"You luxuriate in horrors?"

"Never!"

"Then what?"

"They're absolutely foreign, those little brown creatures, foreign to anything I know anything about — and yet there they are, you know; they exist."

"Is it an awakening within yourself of a sense of your lack of knowledge?" It was the duke who spoke. "That awakens within all of us, that sense. But think, my dear child, how much wiser you are than others of your age and sex. You at least have *seen* the little brown men. Think of the people that you have seen. Besides this charming circle you know the good nuns at the convent; you have had glimpses of society — society in all its phases — you have had advantages, my child, rare advantages for studying your kind — for observing other people. We each live in a universe of our own, Mademoiselle Jeanne, and outside our universe there are other universes, and beyond them still others. It is difficult for some of us to believe in these other universes — it is difficult for some of us to believe in any but our own. The little brown men help us to see the world whole."

"Yes, yes, I know. But with me it's always the other universes — the other people — the little brown men — the people on that yacht — the people in other houses —" Jane was beyond herself. She was breaking the silence of eighteen years. "Now, mother —" she began and stopped.

"Yes?" said Lilla. "Mother? — That was what I was intending to ask you."

"Why, mother's different. She sees the world whole — like a map." Jane turned to the duke, "Of course she's

had what you call advantages — what you say I've had. She's seen the people in other houses !”

“My dear Mademoiselle Jeanne, she doesn't have to see them, her own house is so very big.”

Jane stared. “Mother's? Why, she hasn't got one !”

“Literally, no. Metaphorically, yes. When all our houses are fallen to dust, your mother will smile at us from her window. We accept — passively. Your mother takes — the reverse of passively. Yet I don't wish to make your mother out a thief, even metaphorically. But she is one, she is one — after her fashion. She takes us, — she picks us up with a skilful turn of her strong wrist, — she slings us into the bag she carries over her shoulder —”

“She's never done that to me,” said Jane.

The duke smiled. “Your mother, my child, is an immortal.”

“An immortal? Who?” Mrs. Dench had returned.

“It is you.”

“I? How charming !”

“I was explaining to your daughter a little theory, not new, about the individual universe.”

Mrs. Dench was vague. “Oh, I felt sure that you and Jane would get on. I've sent the note. The captain, you know, is my very good friend.” She took her choice of proffered chairs. “What is that book, Jane?”

“The novel about New York. I wasn't reading it.”

She leaned over and plucked it from her daughter's easy grasp. “Ah — you shouldn't !”

M. Gadillon turned from a contemplation of the embroidered intricacies on Mme. Rostov's sleeve. “I thought the book very interesting. So many books have such elabora-

tion. That is so simple. One reads it as one eats one's dinner or takes a drink."

The princess voiced her appreciation. "Ah, you young men — you young men — you're a lazy lot. Thirty years ago men worked for their pleasures!"

"Ah — in Russia."

The little scarlet-bound volume had again changed hands. It was the duke who had it now. He indicated with an expressive forefinger the name on its title-page. "There's a woman — a woman without a house of her own."

Mrs. Dench again was vague. "How do you know?"

"From reading her book. It has no reality." The duke greatly valued reality.

III

The big white yacht with the American flag was smothered in fine black dust. For her also, Larnaca, in the island of Cyprus, was a town of coal. A collier lay alongside, and little brown men — brothers of those Jane Dench so wondered at — filled bags with the precious fuel, and these bags were raised to the deck of the yacht, from whence they were thrown into the bunkers. It seemed an endless task; the bunkers were devouring beasts, the dust rose black, the Mediterranean sun beat into the deck. The time for coaling ship, said John Barlow, was the early dawn. John Barlow spoke as one who knew. He was the owner of the big white yacht. As to the question of time, his captain agreed with him; and on the strength of the agreement was offered and accepted a cigar.

It seemed that Larnaca objected to the coaling of two foreign yachts at once. It overtaxed her resources. The

problem was one which rarely arose, however, and when it did, it could be arranged. In the case in point, the French yacht, owned by no less a personage than the Duke de Clopin, had been first served. The task, begun at dawn, was finished while it yet was early. At the hour when Mr. Barlow was condoling with his captain, the *Jungfrau* was as fresh and clean as a new-scrubbed puppy. Mr. Barlow glared at her vindictively. In his own country he was the one to be first served. In his own country he was a force to be reckoned with — politically — financially — gastronomically. Especially gastronomically. He was the inventor, the manufacturer, and the patentee of those melt-ingly delicious, medicinally wholesome, delicately brown puffs of nourishment — Barlow's Barley Buns. His yacht was named the *Ballerina*, with few to appreciate the jest.

On the deck of the *Ballerina*, in that part farthest removed from the coaling activities, a young man was standing. His elbows were resting on the rail, his head in his hands. He had handsome hands — bronzed from the sun, but delicately made. Rather surprising hands for the son of John Barlow. And the head which they seemed to support was rather a surprising head. In fact, David Barlow, from his hands to his head, and probably his feet, was as surprising as any delicate and complicated mechanism — a chemist's scales — a surgeon's instrument — the machines by which inventing electricians conquer time and space. He himself was a machine from which all unnecessary bulk had been eliminated. He was hard and fine almost to brittleness, as compact and as distinct as a bronze statuette. His attitude of dejection had in it nothing of limpness; it was the attitude of a young hawk, or a terrier, alert, but still,

whose alertness is suddenly caught and held by the snap of a camera.

The ocean was blue and still and clear. David Barlow watched it, his restless glance shifting back and forth between two points. One of these was the French yacht, the other was merely like a concentration of brightness in the midst of the glare; it was as if on a white sheet there appeared a whiter spot. All around was glitter and blinding sun, and this was a flash as of steel or the wet silver scales of a great fish. But young Barlow's trained eye knew it for the flash of oars and a boat, brass-trimmed. He wondered what message the French yacht had for the *Ballerina* — what friends had unexpectedly appeared. He had thought that for the time he was free of his friends; he had succeeded in giving those of them that were his father's guests what they loudly insisted upon calling shore leave; and his attitude of dejection had in reality been one of enjoyment of his aloofness.

Like many people who find themselves good company, he was essentially an unsocial being. He had his moments of sociality; but the constant abuse by his father's guests of the thing the term implied was making these moments rare. They were like a herd of buffalo, his father's guests, forever pushing to the centre of the herd. It was either that with them or else — in the long starlit evenings — a curious pairing off, chairs drawn two and two all over the deck. David arranged his chair in like manner, and generally found that the only subject he had in common with his neighbor was the universal one of love. The next day — sometimes before that — he despised himself with all the hard intensity that was in him; he despised himself,

not for the fact, but for the company it made him keep. If he had been the only man in the world to make love lightly on a starlit night, he would have come forth with his estimate of himself unscathed. But ten feet away, clearly outlined in the dimness, there was usually a rotund and not too young fellow-fool who was as much moved to sentiment by the champagne he had drunk at dinner as was David Barlow by the tingle of his nervous blood. He despised the fellow-fool as much as he despised himself. Youth was the only excuse for that sort of thing; that sort of thing and age were, thank heaven, anachronistic! He saw before him a vista of blessed years quite unhampered by fair neighbors and starlight. Those were the years when he would conquer the world — not as Alexander, by force, but through men's minds. What — else — was the use of Barley Buns, of vast wealth? For himself he had few wants. Money was lead tied to his feet; it made him a target for women and removed the necessity of a daily wage. But he was studying law. It was to be law at first, and then, by an easy transition, politics, and perhaps an eventual ship of state to replace the *Ballerina*.

He still watched the tender from the French yacht. It was nearer now and seemed to be pressing in upon his planned-for solitude. It was more than a point of greater brightness; it was a point — larger and larger — of irritation. He found himself disliking it with absurd violence. It had a sort of impertinence in the midst of the great, quiet ocean which the native boats quite lacked. It was a sharp, false note, and had the effect, finally, of driving him from his post. He owed it to himself, he felt, not to be bothered. The thing reminded him of a little French dancer whom he

had once seen and not admired. She had worn gold slippers, and they flashed from her draperies much as the oars of her countryman's boat flashed from the water. Her dance had been a flicker of motion, seemingly as uncertain as the flight of a scrap of paper in a breeze; yet it had impressed him at the time — and he still carried its memory — as being almost unbelievably studied and designed. That so much thought should be expended on so slight an end! — David Barlow was a small young man, and his thoughts, like his caligraphy, tended towards the large.

He walked the full length of the deck, his hands in the pockets of his short duck coat, the brim of his sailor's cap turned till it nearly touched his rather high-bridged nose. A dancer's golden slippers — a rope shirt would have made to him a more sympathetic appeal. Though he had never possessed one, — perhaps because of that, — a rope shirt came very near to being his ideal of a garment. He had a leaning towards the ascetic, even the monastic; he found fasting a finer pleasure than feasting, the joys of work greater than the joys of play. And yet the joys — the ardors — of which he was capable, while quite apart from the things of the flesh, were equally removed from the ardors of prayer. It was in a prayer to himself that he put his belief. Upon the day when he stood on the deck of the *Ballerina*, this prayer to himself had attained its greatest urgency. The whole of life was spread before him.

Visions are sometimes associated with vagueness. David Barlow's visions were marvels of exactness. This summer was to be his last; after this the vagaries of nature were to pass unnoticed; henceforward it was to be law — and order; one more year of Law School, — he knew all about that. He

knew the firm that he was to enter on graduating; he even knew the corner of the office where they would place his desk. Joan of Arc tending her sheep and dreaming of armed men couldn't have seen her visions more clearly. And he was ready — ready as an instrument of tempered steel. And because he had been able to conceive so much, his chance of success was high. Then his visions and his prayers and his hard-earned solitude were broken and disturbed by a small, irrelevant object — a flash of greater brightness in the midst of the bright, still ocean. It was nothing but the boat from the French yacht; but to rid himself of the consciousness of it, he went below to his stateroom and locked the door.

IV

John Barlow, together with his son David, was on his way to lunch with the Duke and Duchess de Clopin aboard their yacht, *Jungfrau*. On the strength of the invitation he nearly forgave them the incident of the coaling. Yet he wasn't overflattered. He'd not been born yesterday, had John Barlow, and he knew very well that lunching with a ducal pair near the island of Cyprus was a very different thing from partaking of a similar meal with them near the city of Paris. He had accepted, nevertheless; the duchess's note was written in excellent English, and mentioned, also, a lady of many impossible names and the title of 'princess.' Considering the fact of the princess, Mr. Barlow couldn't help a wholly unworthy sense of relief when he realized that his guests couldn't possibly be communicated with. They were off, the Lord knew where, exploring Larnaca, perhaps gone up into the island, — there were salt pits, — they might

go there. So it was only himself and his son who were able to take luncheon aboard the *Jungfrau*, and Mr. Barlow had the satisfaction of knowing that they were both fully equal to the occasion.

Mr. Barlow was proud of his son. He had a distinction which seemed quite uncontaminated by the Buns. David's mother — poor lady, the ocean had an impossible effect upon her, and she had remained in America — David's mother was in the habit of saying that he lacked the Christian virtues; but this statement David's father couldn't comprehend. He considered that his son even erred a little on the side of the virtuous; he surely was the reverse of dissipated; he neither drank, gambled, nor kept wild company; and money — perhaps because he was familiar with it in a quantity which apparently lessened its value — he used very sparingly. But David's mother said his lack of virtue went deeper than that, and she should have known. His father watched him as he sat in the bow of the tender. He had taken off his hat, and the noon sun beat down on his bared, close-cropped head. His fine, chiselled profile was sharply outlined against the sea. He was indeed a son to be proud of, an heir which any potentate in Europe would find it hard to equal. In the soul of John Barlow the American eagle fairly screamed.

In the soul of David nothing screamed. The young hawk had turned lamb. The expedition was not of his choosing. He felt a lamb led to the sacrifice. And the distance between himself and the big French yacht was constantly growing less. He looked up. It was as if a corner of Paris were suddenly transplanted to the Mediterranean. There were wide, gayly striped awnings and

painted woods and bright rugs ; the little port-holes glistened, and high in the air the many pennants seemed stirred by an invisible breeze. Some one was singing in a light soprano voice to the strumming accompaniment of a guitar.

“Vien, Poupoul — vien, Poupoul — vien —
Vous avec moi ce soir —”

It was the year of “Vien, Poupoul.”

He presently discerned a woman dressed in black standing at the rail. She was holding a pair of marine glasses to her eyes, evidently the better to watch the tender's approach. She gave an impression of age, even at that distance, and it occurred to David that instead of marine glasses she should have had a distaff and flax. Her companions wore light, bright dresses and were scattered about the deck in various attitudes of leisure ; but she was occupied and inexorable. She turned, and her sharp exclamation reached the new arrivals :—

“Look ! There are only two !—”

It was said in French, and seemed by its tone to be an accusation.

“Well, my dear princess, we have done our best.”

The woman who had answered disappeared down the companionway. She had a deep, rich voice, and seemed used to command. David thought her to be the duchess.

There was a moment of noise and confusion — a jabber of tongues — and the gang-plank was lowered. The Barlows were met by their host, a pale little man, exquisitely attired ; and the woman who had gone below wasn't the duchess, for the duke immediately presented them to his wife — a lady quite other. The strange old creature in

black was the heralded Princess Karina. She stared at them: "Were there not more on your beautiful boat? A gay assemblage?"

David, whose French was more fluent than his father's, answered her question.

"Ah — there were more, you say, only they had gone. Where had they gone? Where is there to go?"

David again explained.

"Ah — I am disappointed — I am sad." From the point of view of the Princess Karina Mrs. Dench's note had failed in its mission.

Mme. Rostov paused in her song. "You are so often sad." She turned to the duchess. "Lilla, please present these gentlemen."

"With this lady it is always these gentlemen," said the princess.

M. Gadillon picked at his guitar. "With these gentlemen it is always this lady."

Things had surely come to a pretty pass when the Princess Karina could be openly defied; a long absence from cities and the wear and tear of civilization distorts the sense of values — the sense of what is due. The Barlows bid fair to become a cause of battle. They bowed low to Mme. Rostov. She addressed the elder. It was a type she admired, full habited, with a look of power in the heavy cheek-bones. "You speak French, monsieur?"

"Very little."

"Russian?"

Mr. Barlow didn't speak Russian.

Mme. Rostov made an attempt at English, however, and for the rest of the day John Barlow was not to be reckoned

with. M. Gadillon joined a distant group, which had the effect of bringing forward Jane.

"I saw you while you were still in the small boat, Mr. Barlow," she said to David, and gave him her hand to shake. He admired her beauty.

"You are compatriots," the duchess said.

Jane smiled. "I know we are. Isn't it nice?"

David Barlow found her bold — or at least Europeanized. "Do you come from New York, Miss Dench?"

"No. You see I've only been to America once, when I was a very little girl. My mother and I have always lived over here."

Young Barlow looked in vain for a so far unidentified woman. They were standing in a circle on the forward deck — Mme Rostov, John Barlow, the duchess, the princess, David, Jane, and the duke.

"I," said David, "have spent most of my life in America. This is for me an exceptional adventure."

"What do you do in America?" It was the princess's question.

"I study law."

"The law. I know. And what does your father do?"

David was on the edge of a reckless mood. "My father? He is a manufacturer of buns. Have you never heard of Barlow's Barley Buns?"

The company gasped.

"Oh, yes," said the princess, "a baker."

"Yes," said David, "a baker." He was vaguely reminded of comic opera. These people had spoiled his solitude, but the entertainment they offered him was worth that.

"In your strange country an occupation is not thought degrading."

"Not if it is sufficiently successful."

"Not if it provides you with a plaything like that." The duke indicated the *Ballerina*. "May you be as successful with the law."

"Successful?" asked the princess. "Why, it won't be necessary!"

It was a conversation which John Barlow wouldn't have cared about. The difficulties presented by the foreign tongue were fortunate — fortunate, also, the distraction incident to servants appearing with cooling glasses. But the princess had a tenacity of purpose.

"Mme. Rostov —" she called, "Mme. Rostov —"

The circle had broken and widened, and Mme. Rostov was some little distance away conversing with John Barlow in her pretty, halting English.

"Mme. Rostov," the princess insisted, "your American friend, Mr. Parrish, was he not in trade? Did he not have an occupation?"

"Really, I do not remember. It did not impress me."

"You are very forgetful."

The princess again turned to David. She was making the best of a lack of a gay assemblage. But David would rather have talked to Jane Dench. He admired her beauty, and her presence in that gathering was unexplained — she was so obviously unattached, so obviously wasn't one of them. Her position didn't seem to be dependent, and yet it surely wasn't on the plea of congeniality that she was there. His own guests would have been far less inappropriate. Theirs was only a difference in feather from the

Jungfrau's party; hers was a difference in specie. He couldn't decide whether she was either extremely bold or extremely shy. Her companions were not this last. He still looked for the mother with whom she had always lived 'over here.' He thought that lady mythical. It was all a riddle, and his legal curiosity awaited the solution. But the princess had yet other riddles to propound.

"Tell me, Mr. Barlow, what kind of a woman is Emily Stedman?"

"Emily Stedman?"

"Yes, she is an American. She wrote a book that we are all discussing here, and I feel that you must know."

"I never heard of her."

"Oh, but you must! I half expected her to be on your beautiful boat."

David made an appeal to Jane. "What are they talking about?"

It was in English, and in English that Jane replied. "I don't know, I'm sure. You see I haven't been allowed to read the book."

Jane didn't strike him as a person whose reading would be restricted. Decidedly, David Barlow thought her bold.

"So you do not know this Miss Stedman?" It was again the princess.

"No."

"But you shall. In your country these things are arranged so simply. She is worthy of knowing, I assure you. Her book — for myself I read little English, but I can still see that her book is very clever. Oh, she is worthy of knowing! —" The princess became aware that her listener was not giving to her his full attention — in fact, at the

moment, was not giving to her any attention at all. He was looking towards the companion-way, from which that mythical lady, Mrs. Dench, the mother of Jane, was emerging. But it was not as the mother of Jane that David Barlow saw her.

There are certain phenomena which are always a little in advance of their explanations. Electricity — the human brain — life itself. Nearer and nearer come the answers, and yet not near enough. And added to these is still another, not older, perhaps, but longer puzzled over. For this last the explanations are many. It is called an arrangement of nature, alike shared by the birds of the air and the beasts of the field — a chance further tip of the scales of liking — an unfolding sympathy of soul — the expression of man's sense of beauty. This much-defined phenomenon is love — with man, an emotion. Love, supposedly, was the emotion that made the bronze in David Barlow's cheek deepen and widen till the deeper color overspread his brow and his eyelids and even his throat. But if it were love, it could be explained; and the emotion which suddenly descended upon him has always remained as far from a fitting interpretation as electricity or the human brain or life itself.

For a very perceptible moment he was incapable of movement, and then he turned to find Jane Dench looking at him with a new, odd expression.

CHAPTER IV

CELEBRITY

I

"THANK you, Mrs. Mellish, for what you have been so kind as to tell me." Emily Stedman rose and extended her hand to her visitor. Her other visitor, Ralph Parrish, had long since gone, and the striking of the little gilded clock on the mantelpiece had reminded Mrs. Mellish of the lateness of the hour.

"It seemed best, my dear, that you should know what is said."

"You came especially for that? You were kind. If you'd spoken when Mr. Parrish was here, your kindness would have been complete — as it is, I shall have the disagreeable task of telling him myself."

"But what will you tell him? What can you tell him? I don't understand —"

Mrs. Mellish was surprised at Miss Stedman's sudden laughter. "Is it a subject that a woman of my age can't touch? You know if what you said were true, it would be the easiest thing in the world for us to talk it over quite pleasantly. Even as it is, I think I know my cousin well enough to make him see it."

"But are you sure you see it yourself?"

"Do I see that other people don't see — those people

who have appeared on me from heaven knows where, that have flocked to my little success, the little poets and the little scribblers? The fact that they have time for me shows what they are. They crowd into the light of my lamp, and now they throw mud at me. What possible difference can it make — what they say, or what they think they see?"

"But don't you care?"

"Why should I care? What they say isn't true."

"Ah, you don't have to tell me that!"

"Why do I not? Though it's hardly a case where my word is of value." Emily smiled at Mrs. Mellish, who was gazing at the rather dismantled tea-table.

"Your word, my dear!"

Emily insisted. "It's of no value!" Her eyes followed the direction of her guest's. "You'll have something more? — Do."

Mrs. Mellish again saw that it was late. "I couldn't — really."

There was a silence which Emily broke. "Why, Ralph Parrish and I were children together. We've grown up side by side. I knocked him down once — he lay sprawling in the mud. We were a bad pair; death and destruction followed in our wake; we stole our neighbors' apples and we caught their fish; we used to lay traps for the professors and frighten the students at night. It all comes back to me — the old time. Why, it seems only yesterday that we ceased to kiss each other good-by!"

"And why did you do that?"

"We were too old; we might have been misunderstood."

"But if you are misunderstood without that —"

"We might just as well — is that what you mean?"

Mrs. Mellish looked up quickly. "If kissing each other good-by would give you any pleasure —"

"Think of the moral horror we escape! We at least can have an inner consciousness of rectitude."

"Would it really give you a moral horror? You sometimes have a frivolity in your method of treating serious things. I hardly know what to think —"

"Wouldn't it give you a moral horror, Mrs. Mellish, — kissing a young man good-by, — a young man who was neither your husband nor your son nor your fiancé — even if he were your first cousin once removed?"

"What it would give me has nothing whatever to do with it."

"You don't judge me, then, by your own standards?"

"I've seen too much of the artistic temperament; I've had it in my house, I've dined it and I've wine'd it, I might almost say I've cultivated it —"

Emily cut her short. "I know. It's an excuse —"

"But you've nothing to excuse."

"And even if I had?"

Emily's adviser drew on her gloves. "I don't know what to think. You're quite hopeless."

"I'm sorry if I seem to treat my friends' opinions lightly. It's very difficult to escape the comment of the idle."

"If it wasn't for the gravity of the situation, I should say that you didn't try to escape it — that you rather enjoyed it."

"I've never enjoyed anything so much in my life before. The situation's exquisite."

Mrs. Mellish turned in the doorway. "Ah, my dear, you don't mean what you say —"

Emily waited and presently heard the door in the entry close. The little gilded clock struck the quarter hour. She looked at it, and in doing so caught sight of her own face in the glass over the mantelpiece. Her attention was arrested by an expression which she'd never seen there before, an expression strangely verging on the triumphant. She studied the face in the glass almost as though it were not her own, as though it were something new and curious — the face of an intruding lurker in the shadows behind her. But the triumph had been but a flash in the pan; as she looked, it went quite away. She put up her small, thin hands and smoothed her elaborately coiffed hair. The lace of her sleeve fell back from her arm. The dim light of dusk and lamp lent her a kind of beauty; it was that she stared at now, and her eyes never left the eyes in the glass. As she looked she repeated it over and over. "The moral horror — the moral horror — the moral horror —"

II

Ralph Parrish was walking up Fifth Avenue at the close of the day. At the avenue's lower end was the firm of wholesale fur dealers of which he was a member, and at its upper was the Town Club of which he was also a member. It was at the Town Club that he lived. An organization which made up in comfort what it lacked in fashion, — a league of business men of a prosperity sufficient to pay for luxuries, — it yet excluded from its lists even a suspicion of the Hebraic, and had other qualifications — some of them mysterious to the layman — which made its membership not merely a question of finance. It filled in the great city

a long-felt need; Parrish, in having been one of its organizers, felt himself a benefactor.

It was Parrish's daily habit to walk from his office to his club; and he had another habit, almost as frequent, which was to break his walk by turning in at a street in the late thirties. When he thought about it at all, which was rare, he was afraid that he was becoming as much a creature of habit as the rest of his kind. For a case in point his nomadic tendencies were deserting him. He hadn't left his own country, except by the urgent necessities of fur dealing, since a year from the previous June, and it was now November. He had even been wonderfully faithful to his country's largest city. He had stayed in New York through all the past summer, through all the heat and deadness, and now the air was cold with a first flurry of snow. The flakes clung to his mustache. The pavements were made slippery.

He hesitated a moment at the street in the late thirties, and then turned in. The bad weather promised him a quiet talk, and he would yet have the credit of coming at an hour likely to be interrupted. His intimacy with his cousin was the subject of some comment, and Emily had shrewdly suggested a courting of publicity as an effective means of stopping it. She had a levelness of head in this day of her celebrity. Parrish arrived at her little apartment to find, as he had hoped, that her parlor was empty. He didn't like her friends, and he was glad to be saved the necessity of seeing them. He had a sort of dread of them; he knew, none better, his cousin's possibilities; and if the people who hung about her had been of the marrying kind, he might have dreaded something like that. As it was, his dread was none the less vivid for being in its nature vague.

Miss Stedman was lying down, and begged a moment's grace. Ralph Parrish waited. Her little gilt-trimmed parlor always struck him with a fresh wonder. It was such a very far cry from Hornmouth. It was like nothing so much as the inside of a milliner's bonnet box. Or, at least, it was the way the inside of a milliner's bonnet box ought to look, and it was to the everlasting shame of milliners that it always didn't. The great gay-patterned chintz which ran riot over the furniture, the bright brocade drapery of the piano, the leopard-skin rug, and the light silk curtains were all notes in a surprisingly harmonious whole. The result, if inclined to the theatrical, was still undeniably pleasing. Theatrical — acrobatic — what you will — it fairly demanded applause. Emily Stedman herself fairly demanded it. She had kept her cousin waiting, given him a chance, if he hadn't done so a million times before, to examine every ornament in the little glass case, and when she at last came in, her pause at the door was as if she had stopped to gaze out over imaginary footlights. The bravado of the room was repeated in her manner. The spinster look, the invalid's shawl, the stiff, starched clothes, the firmly placed glasses, was what she had lately endeavored to avoid; and her endeavors had been rewarded by complete success. She challenged the beholder to say that they were not; or to say, on the other hand, that she had gone unnecessarily in the other direction.

"Isn't it abominable weather?"

"Frightful."

"I was taking a nap."

"I hope I didn't wake you up."

"No, not in the least."

She sat down at her tea-table. "I still have some of the cake you liked."

"That's cautious of you."

"Cautious?"

"Placate me — placate me — give the animals what they want."

"Ah — you think you need to be placated with wedding-cake?"

"Heaven forbid! Was it wedding-cake? I didn't know."

"Why do you say, 'heaven forbid'?"

"Because wedding-cake presupposes weddings, and as the only wedding that at all concerns me would be either yours or mine, why, heaven forbid that I should like it!"

"It wouldn't do, would it?"

"Hardly —"

"Yet think of the joy of Cousin Laura. If either of us married, a weight would be lifted from her soul."

His mother's name gave Parrish a moment of embarrassment. Embarrassment was the thing which had most arisen between them since Hornmouth and that afternoon, a year and a half ago, when Emily had felt the need of explaining him to the representative of the *New York Star*. In the little yellow house there hadn't been room for embarrassment; it had been so full of Emily's childhood and Ralph's, every nook and corner had been so packed with dreams — with the secrets of the immortal mind; and the big bare room — the desert swept by a cyclone — had been so occupied by those of the less immortal body. The little yellow house had had all it could do. And then Dr. Stedman had left it for a more eternal dwelling, and his daughter had come to New York.

Parrish watched her as she struggled with the weight of the silver tea-service. He always watched her before he went to her assistance. The large tea-pot she never could quite lift. Parrish cherished the rather original theory that Emily, that daughter of science and learning, was at heart a barbarian. The solidity of her silver was this theory's strongest proof. Though as for the large tea-pot, he himself had presented it to her.

She gave him his tea and his wedding-cake without further comment.

"By the way," he asked, "how did you happen to come by such an immense supply?"

"Of the cake, you mean? Why, I went into a shop and ordered it."

"Yes, I know. But how did you happen to do that?"

"I wanted the shop-girl's views on matrimony. I went to a shop where I wasn't known —"

"You pretended that the cake was for yourself?"

"Did I have to pretend?"

"Oh, good Lord! —"

Emily looked up into his handsome, amused face. "You think it's childish in a woman of my age. That shows that you don't know. There are things you can't begin to appreciate — things you don't possess — imagination —"

"And after imagination?"

"After that a realization of the fleeting nature of time, my dear Ralph."

"You don't mean I'm to go?"

The door-bell pealed out. There were voices in the hall. Parrish rose. "Perhaps that would be best."

Emily was reading a card which the maid had brought

in. She turned. "But you mustn't go —" And then more sharply, — "You mustn't go!"

"If it's any of the strange beings that you gather in from the roadside —"

"That's just what it is. Ah, Mrs. Mellish, my abominable cousin here was on the point of running away."

Mrs. Mellish smiled archly. "We mustn't let him do that!" Archness didn't become her. Parrish reflected that few things would. He resigned himself to his unlucky fate. The lady considered herself a patron of the arts, so he had heard, and in her leisure moments dabbled in spiritualism. She pressed Emily's hand in both her own. "My dear, how are you? How is the great work?"

"My book?"

"Yes, your new book. We wait breathless. What is it to be? Tell me, Mr. Parrish, is it another 'Cuckoo'?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Miss Stedman doesn't confide in me about her work."

"Really — really? I should insist. And what did you think of her article in last Sunday's *Courier*?"

"I don't think Mr. Parrish sees the *Courier*."

"No? But you should have seen it on Sunday, Mr. Parrish. The article was called 'Views on Matrimony — Gathered by the Author of "The Cuckoo."' Well worth reading, I assure you."

Parrish looked at the tea-table. "That explains it, the cake — I see — I see —"

"One must live," said Emily, "and the *Courier* pays."

"It's well for the author of 'The Cuckoo' to talk of paying!"

Emily smiled. "The reports of my royalties have been

exaggerated. I must make the most of my opportunity."

Parrish accused her of a thirst for gold.

She denied it. It wasn't so much a thirst for gold that she had, as a dread of a lack of it. Poverty meant Hornmouth, and an acceptance of her Cousin Laura's invitation to live with her. She was still pushing on to the undiscovered country. Hornmouth she knew. Her Cousin Laura she knew. She was even beginning to feel that she knew Ralph Parrish. Her telling him so, however, was always provocative of his favorite, "Oh, good Lord! —"

III

Instead of a vortex of perpetual motion, Emily Stedman had found New York a city of magnificent quiet. The vortex might go on outside her doors; but her little apartment in the late thirties was the centre of calm in its midst — a calm more absolute than any Hornmouth had ever provided. There was a sense all about her of the life of many people; her windows looked out over the roofs of many houses; and yet the view from her big writing-table was one of sky and sun rather than of the disfigurements devised by man. Emily had never lost the feeling which had come to her on first arriving, — first seeing New York from the steps of the Grand Central Station, — that of being closer to nature than she ever had been before. Even the great white buildings which reared their heads into her daily kingdom of sky and sun seemed far more a part of nature than had seemed the bare New England hills she had left. And at night — when the hotels had turned into shells of light and the office buildings were mere black

masses against the sky, and she had drawn back her curtains and sat quite in the dark gazing out — she was not only near to nature; she was alone with it.

The little poets and the little scribblers who flocked to her success were a less necessary part of her existence than Ralph Parrish supposed. Individually they were nothing to her, and collectively they were the allegorical figures in the decorative canvas of her celebrity. And when she arrived at her real celebrity, — the celebrity quite apart from notoriety, — allegorical figures would be in the way. This real celebrity was yet to come. She was writing a new book in whose wake celebrity was to follow. She had already named it, "Mrs. Dallowfield." The audience she had made with "The Cuckoo" wouldn't like it, and would wonder at her not having continued in the path she had marked out for herself; but "Mrs. Dallowfield" could find an audience of her own.

The book was to be solid with the quality which flashes here and there through "The Blind Alley," and makes up for all the transparent patches and the stumblings — the quality which even brushes the flagrant "Cuckoo" with the tip of its wing. This was the quality of Emily Stedman's genius. It was as elusive as a hat lost in a wind, and she was forcing it, inch by inch, to the service of "Mrs. Dallowfield." It was like making a loaf of bread entirely of yeast. There were times when she was appalled at the difficulty of her task. As well build, single handed, one of the great structures outside her window as represent life through the medium of language. Or perhaps it was easy enough to represent it if you really saw it. And there were times when she was appalled in the other direction. She would stop

short and gaze out, unseeing. "Mrs. Dallowfield," in her mortal dress of yellow paper traced by ink, seemed so precious as to be almost holy. The glory of "Mrs. Dallowfield's" future didn't bear thinking of. Her creator's state of mind might be compared to that of a man on the eve of his marriage with the woman of his choice.

Ralph Parrish didn't care the snap of his finger for the glory of "Mrs. Dallowfield's" future; that was one thing, and he quite another. They were two separate forces meeting only subconsciously in his cousin's complete assimilation, and consequent employment, of his own wider field of view. Her own was of necessity cramped. Her frequently reclining posture gave her an opportunity of studying the ceiling rather at the expense of other opportunities, and even her view of the ceiling ran risk of obliqueness. But if she herself had been in the thick of the fray, how could she possibly have written about it without spoiling her pen and blotting her paper? Ralph Parrish had no pen to spoil and no paper to blot.

It was a Saturday, and still November. Six months would make it May; in May, Emily thought, "Mrs. Dallowfield" would emerge from chaos, a completed creation — in May, if all went well, without pain and without a darkened room. The pain came in sharp thrusts of torture above her eyes and at the back of her neck, and the darkened room followed. It was Dr. Jeffries who insisted, and Emily took it for granted that Dr. Jeffries knew. His bill would indicate it; but he didn't display his knowledge when he advised her against work, for without work how would his bill be paid? Perhaps he thought that without a darkened room there would be no work. Emily sat at her

big table surrounded by "Mrs. Dallowfield's" dismembered parts. It was one of the times when she was weighed down by the magnitude of her undertaking — aghast at her own temerity. Yet she knew, through some inner consciousness blessed of the artist, that in her hands the consummation of "Mrs. Dallowfield" was safe. It kept her up, this inner consciousness; it bridged the periods when the skill seemed gone from her pen; but now she had no need of it; she was stopping work for the day; it was Saturday and Ralph Parrish was coming to lunch.

Afterwards they were to see a much-talked-of actress, a Russian; her play was Russian, too, but in a play of that sort the language wouldn't matter. Emily meditated on the subject of plays. Her own "Cuckoo" had been dramatized, and had failed. Success so largely depended on the popularity of the actor. Parrish had seen the Russian in St. Petersburg, and she was not without honor even in her own country. The door-bell rang. That was the consequence of living in an apartment; even in the late thirties all one's guests were sharply heralded.

"I came up straight." It was Parrish.

"You didn't go to the club first?"

"No. You're not ready?"

Emily explained her lateness by his promptness. "You'll wait? Lunch isn't till one." She left him in order to make amends for her negligence.

It seemed his most frequent occupation — that of waiting for his cousin. He waited for her in railway stations and in her apartment in the late thirties — mostly the latter — which also gave him the before-mentioned, much-to-be-desired opportunity to examine the ornaments in the little

glass case. It was an opportunity which he again didn't take advantage of. The newest page of "Mrs. Dallowfield," with the ink barely dry, topped the yellow pad on the big table. He was aware that in glancing at it he was a little outside his cousinly privilege.

"— not agree with you —" and then quotation marks. Obviously the end of a sentence. There was a new paragraph — quotation marks again. He read: —

"But it has no reality, I assure you. That little moment when they thought it had, that brought the reality nearer. I had a sense of triumph. I've reached out after the tangible so many times, and that was the nearest that I ever came. In heaven one's greatest possession may be an eternal peace of soul; but on earth one's greatest possession is something much more like war. I say 'one' advisedly. It's only the picked few who have it — who are allowed it. For appreciation is as necessary to the full enjoyment —"

The sentence was unfinished. Parrish wondered what Emily was talking about now. In a finished state her ideas might be more clear, though they were always prone to vagueness. Vagueness, however, wasn't a fault of "The Cuckoo's." He wondered if it was true, what people said, that she had genius. The word meant little to him, less than what people said. That brought to him the thought of something else they said; he didn't have to wonder if that were true. Had he reread the newest page of "Mrs. Dallowfield," he might have found there an idea faintly pertinent, even though unfinished. But he might have balked at the analogy thus implied between himself and war. For a man of such great physical strength he was rather markedly on the side of peace. He still waited.

He should have gone to the club first. A maid, becaped and beruffled, a being quite other than the stern hand-maiden of Hornmouth, announced lunch.

"Miss Stedman wishes you to have it. She will be with you directly —"

No, he couldn't do that. His impatience wasn't a matter of hunger. He hoped that his cousin's delay didn't mean a toilet even more striking than usual. At best, they were a conspicuous couple. It was a conspicuousness that Parrish disliked; it gave him a sense of awkwardness, like having to stoop in order to pass through a door that is too low. His conspicuousness was a gift of nature — Emily's wasn't. Others, less contrasting, might pass unnoticed; they never did; and it was this double glory to which Parrish objected. Emily, on the other hand, seemed to court it. She was very much of a child, thought her cousin, in spite of her celebrity and her thirty odd years — a child as well as a barbarian.

The woman for whom he seemed to spend so much of his time in waiting had also, he was afraid, a child's appalling, unreasoning fickleness. She had a phrase, constantly used, "When a thing has outlived its usefulness —." It had an almost commercial ring. But she meant it in its more æsthetic sense — when a thing was for her no longer beautiful, that was the moment to let it go. She used the adjective in its broadest meaning, though with Parrish she could have used it in its narrowest. But Parrish flattered himself that it was something more than his mere physical perfection which had kept his usefulness alive, yet it surely wasn't his beauty of soul, and he was incapable of further probing. He was afraid that this highly desirable attribute

—whatever it was—might be suddenly, unwittingly lost. A sudden movement might stir and disturb it beyond hope; though a movement in just the right direction . . . What *was* the right direction? He found himself in the awkward predicament of not knowing. He usually had a certain rough intuition about women, the sort of sense by which a mountaineer finds his way down the side of a mountain; but with his cousin this path-finding instinct failed him. That was *her* greatest attraction, *her* special little attribute. Even if she were but a pale literary lady, — part New England old maid and part barbarian, — he liked her better and longer than any woman he had ever known. He had wild moments of wondering whether he mightn't eventually ask her to marry him. But before he could make up his mind, there always appeared the lowering possibility that she might refuse him. And opposed to this, and even more distasteful, was the possibility that marriage was her end and aim.

Whatever it was she wanted with him, she was so constructed that when she got it she would want it no longer. His usefulness would be outlived, his mysterious attribute gone. She might, of course, never get it — that was his safety — a safety almost feminine. And then Parrish's rough, path-finding thought came back to the sad mistake of a movement in the wrong direction. His dread had the quality of a premonition. He felt that he stood in imminent danger of losing his unfathomable one. That sudden, injuring, stirring movement might be made by another than himself, by one whose knowledge of the right direction would dwell at his finger-tips. But Parrish couldn't guard against that — he centred all his energies upon keeping

himself just where he was. If the accomplishment of this feat gave a handle to scandal, why, he regretted it deeply.

IV

"Ah, you wore the brown dress! —" Parrish's tone displayed his relief.

Emily, reëntering the room after her prolonged absence, responded to this with one word — "Lunch!"

"Is it ready?"

"Long ago — didn't you know? You should have had it."

"Oh, that was all right. I didn't want it. I imagine that the Russian can wait."

Emily was putting away "Mrs. Dallowfield." "And I thought that Russians were such an impatient lot. You'll have to translate her bit by bit, you know."

"If you're depending on me to translate the play, why, I don't speak Russian."

"You've been there."

"Yes, but I've always had to manage with French."

Emily's dining room opened directly out of her parlor. When the white-painted folding doors were at their widest, the two rooms seemed one; half closed there was visible a pretty vista of polished mahogany and silver. To the pair who finally sat down to a long-delayed meal, the vista was the other way about; but that also was pretty, and though opposite one to another, they were so seated as to both have the advantage of it. Conversation at Emily's very often took the form of comment on the use she had made of her space — the success of her decorative scheme. She was always adding some new bit which provoked

admiration, or moving those she already had. Her friends were quite in the habit of breaking their necks over furniture freshly arranged. The big writing-table had to be by the windows in one room and the dining-table remain in the middle of the other; but beyond that they never could be sure. Ralph Parrish was the only person fully initiated into the puzzle of his cousin's changes. He usually made them with her, lending his strong hand to the new placing of a sofa or the rehanging of a picture. It had been on the previous day that he had assisted in moving the piano.

"Do you think it looks well now?" Emily asked. Her eyes had been fixed on it as she drank her soup.

"Yes, very well."

"You see, where I had it before, it was rather in the way. If the room were two feet wider —"

"If you'd taken the apartment downstairs, the room there is fully that."

"Yes, Ralph, I know, but I like the view here."

"And nine weary flights of stairs when the elevator stops."

"Yes — the other night — you told me, and how Mrs. Mellish said she would never come to supper here again. But she will; she would come again if there were twenty flights of stairs to go down."

"How so?"

"How so? Why, she'd sell her soul to find out about me."

"What is there to find?"

"Nothing whatever. But curiosity about me is as general as it's unaccountable. I'm like a mongrel dog, frightfully imperfect, but with an individual kink to its tail and

set to its jaw. I'm a sort of an anachronism — or is it anomaly?"

"I'm sure I don't know." He was amused at her volubility; her tendency to chatter was one she generally had the strength to control. But to-day she was tired, and, on the top of that, she was excited. It was one of her moments, comparatively rare, of being excited by him. Like sweet wine, Parrish required the right moment — the more so, as instead of following the usual course of wines, he had come with the years to an occasional flavor of syrup. Still, there he was, always a bottle ready in her cellar; and the cellars of pale literary ladies are in that direction none too widely stocked. They must slake their thirst as they may, and thank their good Lord for the chance. Emily, brought up in an atmosphere of science, didn't believe that she had a good Lord; but even if she had, her thanks would not have been too tempered by reservations. A life which didn't contain at least a substitute for Ralph Parrish was beyond her conception.

They were not as late for the theatre as they had expected to be, or perhaps the Russian idea of time lacked precision, for the curtain rose as they took their seats. In spite of the shortness of her life in New York, Emily had already seen more than one production of the play, "Hedda Gabler." It made to her a very strong appeal — she refused, even, to consider it wholly pessimism. Besides its marital infelicities and sudden deaths, it had, she thought, an appreciation of the joy of living. She had seen the title rôle played by an Englishwoman who brought to it a magnificent physique and an infinite capacity for portraying boredom, and again by a young, much-talked-of actress, a panther-

like lady whose attraction was none the less sensuous for being a matter of angles rather than of curves. But this soft little Russian, whose obviously Slavic origin seemed so oddly at variance with her bloneness, who sent the conventional conception of Hedda Gabler to the four winds of heaven and made of her a smooth kitten purring by the domestic hearth, this soft little Russian held her in her easy grasp and brought the hard tears close upon the laughter. The alien tongue was forgotten in the understanding which seemed to stretch across the footlights from the actress to the writer — an understanding which had to make up, in part, for the absolute lack of it existing between the actress and the majority of her audience. But as Emily said to Parrish at the end of the first act, turning towards him as she did so a tense, white little face, "The glory of knowing that you yourself are great is the only true glory."

For Emily, however, there were really other glories, of which not the least was that of finding herself happy. On this afternoon she was as purring, as contented, as the Russian kitten who basked before the stage fire across the footlights; but her enjoyment was a finer thing than mere contentment; it came from nerves stretched tautly in tune and the perfect pairing of circumstance. For Parrish was seated beside her, and she was witness of an histrionic art to which she would have taken off her hat even if to do so hadn't been a theatre rule. She was emotionally at the crest of the wave; she had reached that high point of appreciation which so made for her quality of genius. And she had the happy faculty of impressing upon Parrish her own mood — he saw things through her which, except through

her, he wouldn't have seen. It was a faculty almost on the borderland of hypnotism, of telepathy. It is certain at least that she could consciously or unconsciously acquaint him with her thought without the awkward wordy medium. Ideas sometimes floated about in his spacious head which could be accounted for in no other way; it was one of the reasons why he liked her so much. She acted as an interpreter of himself to himself; she seemed to cast a brilliant light by which he found it possible to see. He saw her there in the seat beside him with a wonderful clearness; he saw the play almost as she did.

In the second act was the scene between Hedda and her former lover over the photograph album, conceived by the Russian kitten in a spirit of barely sheathed claws. It is a scene in itself great, but with the Russian kitten it didn't have to be: "Ah, hush! — That was my name in the old days when we two knew each other — I can't allow this." And at the entrance of Tesman, her husband, "This is the view from the Val d'Ampezzo, Mr. Lovborg. Oh, yes, there are the Dolamites —" the husband leaves — "You may think 'du,' but you mustn't say it." Her lover speaks of theirs having been a comradeship in the thirst for life — recalls her threat to shoot him, thinks her not having done so cowardice — "But my not shooting you wasn't the way in which I most showed cowardice!" She persuades him to go to a supper at the house of Judge Brack. Drinking had been one of his vices before his reformation, and at the supper drinking will obviously be the chief source of entertainment; but in recklessness Lovborg goes. He is to return at ten o'clock in order to take home Mrs. Elvsted. Mrs. Elvsted is the woman who has worked his

reformation, and an old friend and schoolmate of Hedda's. "Oh, Hedda, why did you do that? Why did you send him?" "It will give him control of himself — he will be a free man for the rest of his life." "He will come back at ten?" "As I see him — so and no otherwise —"

They sat there, Emily and Parrish, he seeing it almost as she did, and knowing with another attention, not occupied with the drama, that she was there in the seat beside him, she uplifted to a point of appreciation which was in itself genius. With her as with him, it was the perfect pairing of circumstance, the two dominating presences, that counted — each other and the art of the Russian kitten. But the Russian was a kitten no longer. She paused with her hand raised to the red hangings of the Tesman drawing-room. She was very quiet, very still, and her voice — when it came — had in it the surprise of a spring, "To-night at ten o'clock Eilert Lovborg will be here with vine leaves in his hair!"

Ralph Parrish knew enough Russian to understand that. "Ah — Emmy! —"

Something seemed to leap between them in the half darkness.

The sluggish audience was moved to a faint applause, and in response the curtain slowly reascended. The actress was yet standing there, her hand raised among the draperies — very quiet, very still — and succeeding in attaining, in spite of her stillness, to the absolute presentation of human passion. She showed it to you in its fine, hard essence; it was as if you had beheld the interdicted contents of a suddenly opened box.

Emily and Parrish gave the effect of blinking a little in

the full glare of lights. Emily, with her store of invalid memories, was reminded of a sick-room at night suddenly illuminated by the nurse. Light, then, — as it does at no other time, — forces its color upon the consciousness. The color of the light that flooded the front of the house was nearly white. Emily remembered that long afterwards — that and the excitement which possessed her, which was more than appreciation, more than contentment, more than tuned nerves.

“Ralph, there’s some one trying to bow to you —”

“Where?”

“Don’t you see — in that box, the extraordinary old woman dressed in black, holding the opera-glasses?”

“By Jove! It’s the Princess Karina! Pardon me just for a moment.” Parrish was obviously stirred.

CHAPTER V

ANTICLIMAXES

I

JOHN BARLOW was engaged in his favorite occupation — that of looking at his son. It was, he told Emily, an occupation he'd had little enough chance at of late; and the spectacle of the young David familiarly seated in his own drawing-room, even though he was talking with a Russian princess, warmed the very cockles of the elder Barlow's heart.

"Yes, it's good to have him back — it's good to have him back. It was a year ago last summer that I left him. He came with me as far as Paris and then suddenly decided to come no farther."

"Your son went with you as far as Paris and then didn't return to America?"

"You see it was like this. We were cruising in the Mediterranean, and when we left the Mediterranean, David went with us as far as Paris; and then, instead of coming on to New York, he stayed in Paris. In fact, I believe that he afterwards went back to the Mediterranean. He's a queer boy. And at one time I thought he would some day make a name for himself in the law."

"Oh, but he yet may!" Emily was feigning an interest which she did not feel. John Barlow was her host at a dinner of which she and the Princess Karina were the guests

of honor, and if he desired to talk about his son it was for her to follow in his lead. He couldn't talk about his son, to the Princess Karina; he lacked a language in which to do so.

"I can't say that I agree with you, Miss Stedman; I think that David's law was a castle in Spain. And of course it isn't as if he had to earn his living; but still, I should like to see him make a name. I don't mind confiding to you that I should like to see him famous. He's got it in him!"

"Perhaps he'll marry a famous woman," said Emily.

"You, for instance."

Emily laughed. "Why not the Princess Karina?"

"Oh, she's a bit old for David. He's only twenty-five, you know."

"Really? He seems more than that. But he's the sort of young man with whom age doesn't matter. The day I first saw him he was with the princess, and most devoted."

"When was that?"

"I was with my cousin, Ralph Parrish, at the theatre."

"And he was at the theatre?"

"He and the princess. My cousin knew her in Russia, and she was so kind as to remember him. She invited us to sit with them in her box — or rather to sit with *her*, for when she first saw us she was alone. Your son had gone out to get a programme, and he returned to find us ensconced. He wasn't pleased."

The father protested. "Why, yes, he was — he was pleased to death. He told me he was. 'I've just had the pleasure of spending an hour in the company of Emily Stedman.' 'You don't mean the woman who wrote "The Cuckoo"?' I asked. 'The very same —' And as for the

princess, she was shouting with joy, 'You must have her here — you must have her here —' David translated it for us, and you see we did our best!"

"So the princess is staying with you? I didn't know —"

"Yes. She's been intending to make the trip for years. She's always heard so much about New York, and never having been here, — never even having been in America, — she felt rather out of it. She finally made up her mind just at the time that David was coming back, so he looked after her a bit on the steamer and then brought her straight here. She hates hotels."

"Ah," said Emily, "you see he is devoted!"

"Yes; but not to the Princess Karina."

"Then there is some one —" It struck Emily that she was carrying her feigned interest too far. If Mr. Barlow wished to discuss with her the affairs of his son, that was his business; but considering the fact of her having, up to a month ago, never so much as heard of the Barlows, it would be easy for her to be accused of prying.

"If he were devoted in the way you say," said Mr. Barlow, "he'd hardly be batting about Europe with her and coming over on the steamer with her and bringing her here. Would he now?" David's father smilingly demanded a denial. "Would he?"

At that moment Emily's impression of the Barley Bun King was very much that which had so attracted Mme. Rostov. As he sat there facing her in his big gilded parlor, his legs crossed, his whole being expressive of the contentment of a strong man newly fed, the impression he made on her was of tremendous power. How could the son of a man like that fail to be an anticlimax?

She finally brought out the thing demanded of her. "Well, no, I suppose he wouldn't — not in just that way. But tell me, isn't it a rather complicated process, having a lady of the rank of princess staying in the same house with you — and that house yours? Aren't there questions which constantly arise? I always imagined a princess as travelling in state with a host of retainers, and having at hotels the royal suite."

"Oh, it's nothing like that. Merely a maid, so my wife tells me, and meals in her room at peculiar hours."

"It's good of you —"

"Not at all; we feel honored. And besides, David insists."

Emily looked up. "And I suppose that you're glad to get David at any price — even *with* the princess."

"Yes, if he'll stay."

"Does he think of returning to the Mediterranean?"

"I can't make out that he does."

The subject of all this discussion came up at this. He had left the princess in the safe hands of Ralph Parrish, and he felt that the moment had arrived to devote himself to her whose celebrity was a thing of her own making.

"What is it, father, that you can't make out?"

John Barlow seemed fairly caught. Emily gave him her aid. "We were discussing your affairs in the most shameless manner — hoping that the Mediterranean wouldn't again claim you."

The younger Barlow laughed. "You speak as if the Mediterranean were a devouring beast!"

"Why not a siren who sits upon a rock combing her hair in the sunlight?"

"Who forever calls me into the deeps?" asked David.

"Put it like that."

"Who knows but that I may go?"

"Where — into the deeps?"

"No, back to the Mediterranean." David Barlow had an ease of manner rather surprising in one so young — so young, and at the same time so masculine. Ease, in this particular, presupposes precocity, and precocity usually follows in the wake of effeminateness. David Barlow's precocity was less a matter of character than of circumstance. There were certain things of which he had learned the value too soon. Ease of manner in a situation requiring delicacy might be one of these. For one so young he must have been in a good many situations requiring delicacy, and his enforced knowledge of how to treat them had worn him a little fine. Between his restless terrier's eyes there was a line which might have been of pain. His hammered bronze profile was an even more intricate piece of workmanship than it had been on that sunlit morning a year and a half ago when he had stood on the deck of the *Ballerina*, his elbows resting on the rail, his head in his hands. But to one who had seen him then, and saw him now again for the second time, the increased intricacy of his profile wouldn't make up for its increased whiteness. He had a look of having been broken upon a wheel which he then quite lacked.

To Emily, who had never seen him before the other day at the theatre, and who therefore came at him quite fresh, as it were, he seemed merely a rather pale young man of a type she knew very little about. In fact, she wondered why his family — not to mention the Princess Karina —

should be looming so large on her horizon. She supposed that was the price paid for celebrity — if people were sufficiently insistent, it was hard to avoid them; and of course the celebrity was just what made them insistent. Of this new group it was the Princess Karina who most dogged her footsteps. Emily found herself better known in Europe than she had supposed; the princess told of a cruise made bearable by her book.

“You must have had a stupid time!” Emily’s French was shockingly bad.

“Indeed, no — without ‘The Cuckoo,’ who can say? But with it —”

“I thought that the albatross was the usual accompanier of voyages.”

There was a laugh from David.

The authoress turned to him. “What difference does it make — *what* bird?”

“As long as it is a bird of good omen? None.”

They were all together at one end of the big room, — David, Emily, the princess, and John Barlow. The princess had lately joined these latter three, leaving Ralph Parrish alone with his hostess. The rest of the dinner guests had gone, and something in the expression of Parrish’s back told Emily that he was waiting for her to do the same. Not that her going really concerned him, for this wasn’t one of the houses from which he could himself see her home. That was only done in the case of mutually intimate friends who would be sure not to think it queer, and the Barlows were but the most casual acquaintances — David a friend of the princess and the princess a friend of the Rostovs, Monsieur and Madame, whom Ralph Parrish had known in

Russia. Emily wasn't sure but that she was a little jealous of the princess; she represented a page in her cousin's life of which she herself hadn't had the turning. Her sense of possession was disturbed. Yet she knew that there must be many such pages; a pale little literary lady couldn't expect to have the whole of a big man like Parrish in her keeping.

She looked at him now. He was being bored. But it was a condition only obvious to one who knew him well; he always had beautiful manners, and he was giving to his hostess what seemed to be his closest attention. Mrs. Barlow, in her turn, was apparently giving him hers. There was a positiveness in all she did — a positiveness and a quality of triumph. It was as if the fact of her having married John Barlow and living to tell the tale was in itself a matter for congratulation — "I married him and I kept his house, and I even presented him with a son, and here I am!" That was her attitude. She was small and sharp, and, to those who could forgive these attributes, handsome. The princess immediately called her *La Petite Caporalle*. It was true she sat her chair as a soldier sits his horse — though without straddling.

How, indeed, could the son of such a pair fail to be an anticlimax?

II

The Barlows, led by John, frankly added themselves to the list of Miss Stedman's admirers. The little poets and the little scribblers had to make way; Mrs. Mellish found her lion roaring at another board; Ralph Parrish was in the awkward predicament of a man whose rival occupies the

impregnable fortress given by years and an aiding and abetting family.

It was one of those times for which Parrish seemed destined when there was nothing to be done. He again waited. It occurred to him during the leisure thus engendered that his intimacy with his cousin depended rather appallingly on chance. On that epoch-making occasion when they had gone together to the theatre, they were nearer to what would have been his ideal of the situation than ever before. There had been a moment between them, — Parrish remembered it without being able quite to place it, — but a moment with no sequence. He had a tendency to swear at the Princess Karina. She had cut the thread. He found himself flooded with memories against which Emily didn't hold her own; but then when you came to that, who else was there, on this side of the Atlantic, who could? The flooding memories were conquerable. To turn out the intruding Barlows required some definite action, and with that he didn't know for what he might let himself in.

The Barlows had no such dread. John Barlow's fortress was impregnable. He always had a fondness for the small and sharp in women; and the small and sharp combined with a bewildering elaboration of wit and charm and delicacy! — his only regret was that Miss Stedman was too old for his son. And even if she hadn't been, he understood that she was already bespoken. "When you and Mr. Parrish marry —" He brought it out when she was again dining at his house.

"Believe me, Mr. Parrish and I will never marry —"

"Each other or somebody else?"

"Each other, I meant. Of course, I can't answer for what Mr. Parrish may do in regard to somebody else."

"But you can answer for yourself?"

"Oh, quite!"

Barlow smiled. "You're wedded to your art?"

"Not in the least!"

The denial was at once so firm and so gay that Emily Stedman's admirer was moved to ask another question, "Then what *are* you wedded to?"

It was a question which Emily waived. "I would be such an appropriate subject for matrimony," she said at last.

For a moment Mr. Barlow trembled for the sanctity of his dinner-table. He had heard that Miss Stedman's conversation was not at all guaranteed, and what could one expect with "The Cuckoo" ever ready to announce the ringing hour? — but, nevertheless, he felt that in pursuing the subject further he was taking his life in his hands. "You mean? —" He paused.

"I mean just what I say. Imagine me as anything but Emily Stedman!"

"Would marriage so change you?"

"Why, it might even kill me."

"Anything that killed you we could never forgive."

"But fancy what a success I'll be in heaven."

"If marriage is your road to heaven, my dear lady, by all means take it." Barlow again felt the ground under his feet. "Take it," he repeated, "take it —"

"You advise me to die for love? Oh, I may die without that. But I suppose your idea is that as long as I must die anyway, I may as well do so for something worth while. People don't, you know, die for things worth while. In

heaven it must be the things one hasn't done that one regrets — not those one's done."

"I thought that in heaven one didn't regret."

"Oh, surely! For in hell there can't be time —"

"Hell's busier. I see."

"I like the way you accept my authority! What do I know about it?" She turned to her other neighbor, and Barlow heard her address him with the note of gayety still forced high. "Tell me, don't you think it queer, Mr. Barlow's acceptance of my authority about heaven and hell? "

As he still looked at her, — her bedecked though exposed little back so oddly surmounted by the turned profile of her eager white face, — John Barlow's admiration was suddenly completed by a sense of pity, — a sense which was not made less by either Miss Stedman's gayety, her celebrity, or her tangible, enviable success. He felt sorry for her much as he might feel sorry for a waif who sold apples at a street corner.

From one point of view he was right. Emily Stedman was undeniably a sister of the waif who sold the apples; but the relationship — and here it was that he was wrong — the relationship was not one to excite pity. His guest had herself claimed it, — brought it upon herself, — and with herself to thank, pity was unjust. Waifhood is the condition preferred of the egotist, and Emily Stedman was an egotist before she was anything else. To her, waifhood was a synonym for independence; she was stray, but she was ownerless. She was free to go and to come — her freedom was only bounded by her opportunity. And her opportunity — what was that? As the boundary of so much

freedom it seemed, in one direction at least, to be even more of an anticlimax than little David Barlow, as the son of his parents, couldn't fail to be. It seemed to be Ralph Parrish.

Parrish wasn't at this second dinner of the Barlows. He wasn't always asked with his cousin. There was no real reason why he should be — why, for that matter, any one should be. It was one of the causes of her success as a celebrity that Miss Stedman was wonderfully unattached. At this second dinner of the Barlows she was quite among strangers. There was not one in all that parallelogram of faces which a few weeks ago she had ever seen. She wished that Parrish always would be asked with her. No matter how great a length of table lay between them, — and it usually managed to be considerable, — the sight of him and the sense of his presence gave her less a feeling of lightheadedness. Lightheadedness was the disadvantage of complete waifhood, and it occasionally verged on dizziness. Her lightheadedness was all to do with her unattachment — wouldn't an only sailor in a small boat in mid-ocean have occasional moments of it? But the glory to the egotist of a lonely communion with the open sea! Yet the sailor's egotism, if it led him to refuse aid from a passing steamer, would be called insanity.

As Emily looked about her, she felt like an actor in a company of travelling players who finds himself alone upon the stage facing a new audience in a new town. With her freedom and her loneliness and her new audience who didn't know the play, there were wonderful possibilities of opportunity. And her freedom was bounded only by that.

When she left, David Barlow himself saw her into her cab.

"David, see that Miss Stedman gets off safely —" His father had said it to him, and his acquiescence was drowned in Miss Stedman's laughter. "Speed the parting guest! — I should think you would want to get me off safely; it's after eleven o'clock. If this habit of lateness grows on me, the next time I come, I'll have to bring my bag and stay. Of course, we were having a lovely talk, and that may be some excuse, but nevertheless —"

"What is the conventional hour for departure?" David asked of her as together they came down the broad stairs which led to the hall door. The Barlows' was the newer type of house with the hall door on a level with the street and the parlors above.

"After dinner — the conventional hour? I'm sure I don't know. When the first woman leaves, I suppose."

"It's snowing!"

Emily didn't have to be told. She felt it in the first soft, cool breath that came in through the opened bronze door.

"In the country there'll be sleighing."

"Don't speak of sleighing — I hate it. Miles and miles of bleakness and black trees against the snow — and cold, and the constant tinkle of bells — Here, where there is no sleighing and no great frozen spaces, and the good gray pavement shows through the whiteness, or at most you can scrape the whiteness away with an inquiring foot — here, with the smothered sound of wheels and horses' hoofs —"

David interrupted her. "And automobiles!"

"Yes, and automobiles —"

"You like it better?"

"Much, much better." She stood with David watching the cabman come to life under the spell of the butler's

whistle. He had been sitting on his box with the droop peculiar to his kind — a droop expressive of utter hopelessness, in a slough of despond so low that the falling snow couldn't possibly reach him. The butler's whistle had a magical effect. He became, immediately, an able member of society. "You know I oughtn't to keep you here, bare-headed and with no coat —"

"Why not?"

"You'll catch cold. You must remember this isn't the Mediterranean!"

"Indeed, no."

The butler's hand was on the handle of the cab door. He inwardly agreed with Miss Stedman that a hatless and coatless condition was dangerous. But that lady didn't seem to practise what she preached. She stopped halfway to the cab: "You won't go back there?"

"There?"

"To the Mediterranean."

David laughed. "I'll try not to!"

His adviser's reply was still more merry. "Of course, what you can't guard against is having the Mediterranean come to you."

"Mohammed?"

"Exactly."

"But I'm not a mountain."

"Indeed you're not! — Ah, I really mustn't keep you here."

With John Barlow's admiration for Emily, pity was the completing note — the note that made the admiration perfect. Pity was merely the beginning of Emily's admiration for his son. It came over her, this sense of pity,

and without the slightest apparent cause — or at least his momentary exposure to the elements was an insufficient one. As she stood there in the white soft night, she was suddenly conscious of an instinct which she had thought herself without — in fact, she had rather prided herself upon being, in this particular, the exception of her sex. It wasn't love. She already knew something of that, and this was quite strange to her. It was an instinct fatal to the egotist — the instinct a mother has for her child. It was only very slightly that it stirred within her; she was aware of it most through the causelessness of her sense of pity.

She turned and got into her cab. "Good night!"

"Good night! Does he know where to go?"

Emily repeated the address in the late thirties. Through the medium of David and the butler it finally reached him to whom it would most do good. The effect given was that of a secret countersign being passed from mouth to mouth.

"Well, for the last time, good night." Emily smiled, and leaning forward met with her own her young host's extended hand.

There he stood, slim and straight. He was like a curious ghostly etching, sharply black and white save for a faint compromise of gray where the snow had settled on his shoulders. In the dim light his hair showed for black, and black, also, were his clothes, his line of white starting with his waistcoat and the front of his shirt. Emily, her white-wrapped figure outlined against the interior darkness of the carriage, was almost as colorless as he. They might have been two modern spirits of the storm, born of it and gone

with its passing, as ghosts are born of the midnight hour and go with the crowing of the cock.

III

"Heyeh, Miss Stedman, I got something foh you!" The elevator boy at the address in the late thirties brought forth from his pocket a rather crumpled piece of paper. "The other boy — he went off duty at half-past ten, and he said I'se to be sure to give it to you right smaht when you come in — and see! I don't forget to do it —" There was a gleam of teeth in the black face.

Emily unfolded the paper, which was unnecessarily large for the message it contained: "'Mr. Parrish called up at nine and again at ten.' He telephoned?"

"Yas'm, he telephoned."

"Did he leave any message?"

"I don't know, m'm. Sam — he wrote what's theh, and he went off at ten-thirty. He said I'se to be sure to give it to you and —"

"Yes, you did. I'll remember to thank you. How late do you stay on?"

"One o'clock."

The latter part of this conversation had taken place in the elevator, which had now reached the ninth floor. The negro paused, however, before he drew back the iron gate. "Is theh anything I can do foh you, Miss Stedman, befoh I go? I'd be real pleased — anything." He presented to her a mind as open as his countenance, but Miss Stedman said no.

"No," she repeated as she stepped out of the elevator, her latch-key ready in her hand.

She found her apartment cold. The beruffled little maid had gone out, leaving the steam turned off. The beruffled little maid was a snare and a delusion, besides staying out far too late. As she knelt down to arrange the steam, Emily promised herself that she would speak to her in the morning; and in the morning she would telephone Ralph. Twice — at nine and again at ten — she wondered. But now the important thing was to get warm and to get to bed. She had that subtler form of the instinct of self-preservation which is given to the invalid; she knew the exact line of fatigue not to overstep, and to-night she had almost reached it. Her lightheadedness gave a hint of becoming a physical fact. She looked forward to the morning; the morning was the time of strength and rested nerves. But there were many things to do before that. She seemed to be wearing a million garments and to take from her hair endless hair-pins. The presence of the beruffled maid would have simplified the unfastening of her dress.

Half her consciousness was occupied with these minor difficulties, the other half with the information so faithfully conveyed by the elevator boy. She reread the rough, pencilled scrawl. Twice — at nine and again at ten. Once, she could have understood. She had thrust the thing into her mirror between the frame and the glass; and there it faced her, an object seemingly incongruous. The scrap basket gaped for it. And after all, why shouldn't Parrish have called her up twice? He probably wanted to see her — the state of mind was not unprecedented.

At last she was divested of the million garments. The process left the room disordered, or would have done so if

the garments in question hadn't been so small and so ornamental. The floor — the chairs — the pretty white bed — were dotted and strewn with them, from the long white glove — its expressive empty fingers spread wide — to the slipper which lay in the middle of the rug kicking defiance at its mate. It was of satin and had a suggestion almost bridal. Emily remembered the cake of which Ralph Parrish had liked the flavor but not the implication. His admiration of her slipper would probably have a similar reservation — abstractly, as a slipper, even not abstractly, as her slipper, he would like it immensely; but as a wedding slipper — no. Why, Ralph Parrish could have crushed it in his hand, breaking the thin sole backwards and wrenching away the heel! The vivid vision of him suddenly filled his cousin's eyes and was the instinctive cause of her sudden putting on of a garment as elaborate as any which she had taken off.

The steam was making strange sputtering noises in the pipes. Emily felt the warming iron. It seemed to take so long; by the time the room was really fit, she would be in bed with the blankets up about her ears. She opened the door into the parlor. That was better, and stepping across the coldly polished floor she went to the windows to draw the curtains closer. Outside was a world of faintly moving white — a motion of flakes not unlike the vibrating background of a cinematograph. Far below came the muffled clang of an electric car. She arranged the curtains and stepped back into the room. She was in that first stage of the approach of sleep when sounds jog the senses. She was usually rather nocturnal of habit, but to-night bed was her goal, and, being so, it was queer she didn't reach it

sooner. At the moment her power to reach anything was slight. Her fatigue had got beyond her desire for rest. If rest meant exertion before it could be attained, it was hardly worth while, and she felt that there were so many things yet to do. She drew the folds of her elaborate garment more closely about her; it was a creation of Oriental splendor, red, with an intricate and contrasting embroidery. The noise of the steam had changed to a dull, spasmodic pounding; it would have been better, she thought, never to have turned it on. It would have been better — her attention wandered; she was trying to remember some of the many things between her and rest. She started at the rattle of a key in the door.

It was the beruffled maid returning. The maid was kind, and gave her a hot drink and put her to bed.

She slept heavily and awoke in the looked-for morning with the strong sense upon her of having missed while sleeping the thing which had made the morning looked for. The morning was the time of strength and rested nerves. She was rested to the point of dulness, and as for strength — lying in bed she was hardly in a position to tell. But there had been something else which the morning was to have brought forth; she was too fresh from sleep to name it; she felt — only — that it was this which had escaped her.

She lay there, very still, and it was presently borne in upon her awakening senses that the million garments of the night before were nowhere to be seen. The beruffled maid must have put them away. It was her first hint of the lateness of the hour, and looking at her watch she found it nearly noon. The maid heard her stirring and came in with break-

fast. It was decided not to speak to her about her being out at night.

"Ah, you did sleep!" She was of French origin and pronounced it 'slip.' "You did slip! But then you were tired. Mr. Parrish telephoned this morning very early, but I would not disturb you, so I said to him that you were out. He was surprised."

"I don't wonder. He telephoned last night — twice. He left no message?"

A comment was ventured. "He is very constant."

The comment was ignored. "I can't help feeling that this is a holiday — Sunday or Christmas or New Year's —"

"The snow makes it so still." The expressive French shoulders shivered.

"You don't like it still?"

"Not like this." She looked towards the window. "And the snow has not yet stopped."

"Yes, it's a real blizzard," said Emily, and then irrelevantly, "With breakfast so late I shan't require lunch. I mustn't forget to telephone Mr. Parrish," she continued half to herself. Her eyes had fallen on the conspicuously placed paper. But she didn't telephone him for some hours. She dressed and settled herself to a long afternoon of work.

It was one of the unwritten laws of the cousins' intimacy with each other that he should always come to her unasked. It was a pleasant fiction between them that he was the busy one, of many occupations and engagements; and that any moments which he could spare from these would anyway be devoted to her, and when he couldn't come, he couldn't — so asking was superfluous. The idea had its root in the past, and Emily's celebrity left it untouched. He

continued to come whenever he could; sometimes she couldn't see him — witness his late failure at the telephone. Her imagination played about this evidence of constancy. His constancy didn't usually show itself in just that way; he was anything but craven. Emily's impulse was to find out what it was all about, but she had a sort of passive self-control which checked it, a respect for the old unwritten law. Yet what was any law, written or unwritten, if her preoccupation with it interfered with "Mrs. Dallowfield"?

It was on occasions such as these, when her preoccupation rose above her will, and her ability to create was blocked and befogged, that Emily Stedman doubted her own talent — her own fitness for her task. Her task was self-imposed, and at the present consisted of bringing "Mrs. Dallowfield" to life. "Mrs. Dallowfield," in her mortal dress of yellow paper traced by ink, was as real to her and as vivid as an actual physical presence. She had believed in her, and from this belief she found it impossible to separate her belief in herself. Now these two beliefs seemed tottering, and she faced the supreme horror to the egotist. She should have had for "Mrs. Dallowfield" a concentration of attention that was nearly pain, and instead she was occupied with the scotching of a harmless impulse. And there had been times when she had deludedly thought her fitness for her task bordered genius. Her self-control suddenly wavered and broke. If the impulse was so harmless — and what was it, after all, but the very human desire to satisfy her curiosity? — if the impulse was so harmless, why not obey it and have done with it? Ralph Parrish desired to speak with her — she, equally, desired to speak with him.

The simple impulse was as incongruous with the fuss made about it as the rough, pencilled scrawl of the elevator boy was incongruous with its position between the gilded frame and polished glass of her mirror. She went into her room and got it. She no longer required the reminder.

The young woman whom Parrish's firm of wholesale fur dealers employed as a telephone girl was rather more intelligent than the usual run of young women so employed. She told Emily that Mr. Parrish was out; in fact, she thought he was away, and further than that, she didn't know. He hadn't been at the office that day, or if he had, she hadn't seen him. His inquiring cousin was persistent and evinced a tendency to argue. A person in authority was called. Emily explained her relationship — another impulse, less simple. Mr. Parrish? — Mr. Parrish had been called away, most unexpectedly. In fact, it was hardly that; for the exigencies of their business required the presence, on the other side, of a member of the firm, and Mr. Parrish had offered to go. He had left in great haste, sailing that morning. His cousin would doubtless hear from him. She politely was sorry to have troubled them. The trouble was nothing.

She came back to the big writing-table, from whose well-blotted top "Mrs. Dallowfield" gazed drearily up at her. She noticed that the vibrating whiteness still continued outside the window; she saw a spot of ink on the cover of the dictionary; and the exact tone of the wall-paper — a pinkish yellow with a slightly darker stripe — was suddenly very clear to her. The chairs, the sofa, the little glass case — all the objects with which she had grown familiar — clamored for her attention as loudly as though they were

fresh from the dealer's; the whole expression of the room, for once bare and bleak, forced itself upon her regard. The veil which is usually interposed between objects and a consciousness of them, the better to safeguard the occupied brain against intruding perceptions, seemed to be torn away.

Emily stood before the big table. Her hands were employed in smoothing out the bit of crumpled paper that she had so oddly taken with her to the telephone. She looked at it dully; her perceptions were paying for their period of activity. Her perceptions — of what use were they now? It was as if a great, opaque sheet, a thousand times thicker than any veil, were drawn down in front of her. She had to feel for her chair, and having attained it she leaned forward until her cheek rested on the smooth, gay paper which was "Mrs. Dallowfield's" abode. It was not to "Mrs. Dallowfield," however, that her cry went out — a cry so shrill and so strangely sharp that the beruffled maid came running.

"Oh — my own — my love! —"

CHAPTER VI

JANE

I

JANE DENCH was sent by her mother to look for a gold bracelet which that lady thought she had left, the night before, on the table in the smaller salon. The Denches were occupying an apartment belonging to some friends who didn't care for Paris in January. They were able to gratify their whims, and they let their really gorgeous place at a rental merely nominal; and Mrs. Dench, with her keen Western eye for a bargain, had sealed the transaction then and there with a check for half the amount. It was her constant effort to make her checks rare, but this one surely brought large returns. Even Jane agreed to that, and Jane was not given to agreement. Her mother's check would have brought larger returns for Jane, however, if she had been allowed to make use of the charming sitting-room with which the new splendor of their space provided her. She did, of course, use it; but just when she would have liked to most, — when the smaller salon was dotted with a polyglot collection, princes of the realm, rich Americans, expatriated Russians, — just then was when she was turned from her sanctuary neck and crop, and made to shed the light of her angel presence over the assembled company. Last night had been a case in point.

The vivid memory of it struck her full in the face as she opened the door of the smaller salon. She had sat there, — the chair upon which she had sat was still by the pink shaded lamp in the farther corner, — she had sat there, among her mother's friends, her grave gaze bent upon her embroidery. Her mother considered her the most perfect specimen of the *jeune fille* in France; she openly referred to her as her greatest triumph — "My greatest triumph, and it's part of her perfection that she wishes to blush unseen — but I don't allow that!" — Bits of idle talk seemed still to fill the air along with the stale tobacco smoke. Chairs other than Jane's were drawn out of their accustomed places. A tray with glasses hadn't been removed. If ever a room were haunted by the ghosts of the departed, it was the smaller salon at nine o'clock in the morning. Jane found the gold bracelet and fled.

Mrs. Dench was having breakfast. As her daughter came in to her, she was in the very act of covering a poached egg generously with salt. She then inserted a knife into its midst and watched the spreading of the yellow yolk with almost the same intentness with which a surgeon would watch the effect of an operation. Dressed as she was, tailored and stiff, in fresh linen and well-pressed cloth, which in spite of its simplicity, had an air of experience in dressing, she might tempt one to carry the comparison of the surgeon further. She had the unscrupulous quality that great doctors are said to possess and a delicate use of her rather heavy and masculine hands. The very sensitive observer might be forgiven a slight shudder even at her method of dealing with the bladder-like surface of her egg. She didn't at all suggest the pampered mistress of a gilded salon — the

idol before whom princes of the realm and rich Americans sent up their incense in clouds of tobacco smoke. One suspected her of a knowledge of tobacco smoke which went deeper than that. If there were any liberties to be taken in her gilded salon, she would be the one to take them — she would be the one to tilt back her chair and relax her soul from the stress of the day's work. And, for her, one perhaps saw as a background for the day's work, the bare, sunlit spaces of a hospital ward.

Bare, sunlit spaces were what Mrs. Dench most suggested, the spaces of her own Western prairie with waving grass, or the open sea or the desert. That was the first impression, — a large simplicity, a veneer of smoothness. But then, as you looked, you became aware that your heel was caught; the intertwining hieroglyphics of a glazed Chinese vase were nothing to her intimate, delicate detail. She was like a great plain, wind-swept, over which there had passed caravans of which the wind hadn't altogether obliterated the footprints. Yet so much had passed that even the footprints were blurred; the personal bias — the personal prejudice — was quite alarmingly absent. And out of this smoothness there came, paradoxically, a personality. Mrs. Dench was a triumph of personality. That was the beginning and end of her, that and a suggestion of a splendor, a sort of tropical vegetation which was guided and bound by the coldness and hardness of the North.

It was sometimes wondered how Jane could be her mother's daughter. Jane's beauty had the gleam and glitter of angels' wings; her eyes were gray like a nun's gray dress, and her smile, coming from the long mouth — her one irrefutable resemblance to the maternal side — was the smile

of a young postulant who gazes at the world from closing convent gates. But her smile was all for the convent — not for the world she was renouncing. Jane Dench had had the world forced down her throat; she preferred the convent. During the past year she had quite forgotten the existence of the little brown men in the boats; her world was the world of her mother's friends; and she gravely felt that her curiosity about it was dead. Last night she had sat in its midst, and her eyes had barely once left her embroidery. Before David Barlow had gone to America, it had been very different — she had liked to look at him.

It was of him that her mother presently spoke: —

“Ah — you found the bracelet! I thought it was there. It's one of David's votive offerings and not a thing I should care to lose.” Mrs. Dench had taken it from Jane's hand and slipped it over her own. It incased her strong, smooth wrist in a circle of gold not unlike that smaller circle which she wore on the fourth finger of her left hand. From the fourth finger of her right there gleamed a splendid sapphire, and a signet ring — large and black — kept it company. She was not at all bejewelled; jewels wouldn't have suited her. Her eyes, with their tendency towards prominence and their color like the deeper yellow of transparent amber, were so much more extraordinary than any jewels she could possibly have afforded. It had not been a question of affording the gold bracelet; that, as she said, was a gift from David. A young man with the enormous sales of Barlow's Barley Buns back of him could treat the gift of a bracelet with the necessary casualness; though, as it happened, the gift of this one had a special significance. He had sent it, Mrs. Dench now told her daughter, on the day of his

departure. "It was so charming of him — so delicate — not to send anything more —"

"Not to keep sending?"

"No — not to send a more elaborate thing. It's so simple, so unpretentious, — it doesn't flaunt his riches in our poor faces."

"It doesn't have to," said Jane.

"Doesn't have to?"

"We see his riches without that."

"Ah — we do —"

"His going makes a difference."

"I don't understand —"

"Why, the duke's not so rich! —"

Mrs. Dench still seemed vague. "The duke? I don't see. But you sound appalling. I don't think you know how appalling you sound!"

But Jane went on, unheeding. "We haven't the use of Mr. Barlow's automobile; we haven't fresh flowers every day —"

"Oh — if that's what you mean!"

Jane turned. "What else could I mean?"

Mrs. Dench glanced up quickly. "You know you're really not half so much of a fool as you make yourself out. Even if you are the most perfect specimen of the *jeune fille* in France and my greatest triumph, your lovely innocence can be carried too far. If you carry it as far as that with strangers, you'll be misunderstood; take it from me — you'll make a mistake — people will think I've coached you."

"And isn't that just what you're doing, mother?"

Jane's mother gave it up. "You're hopeless — hopeless!"

She presently returned to the subject of the bracelet, slipping it off her hand as she walked from the breakfast table to the long window. "It has an inscription — that's why I didn't care to lose it. It's only visible with a magnifying glass, but still, there it is!"

"What does the inscription say?"

Mrs. Dench hesitated: —

"'For you the jungle and me the sea spray,
And south for you and north for me —'

It's Swinburne at his most rabid, but I don't think it will contaminate you."

"That's exactly what Mr. Parrish said last night."

"About Swinburne?"

"No, not that. I forget now just what it was about, but when you sent me in to entertain him — him and Mme. Rostov — and to say you'd be in directly, he said it about something — oh, no, it was Mme. Rostov who said it —"

"In defence of her own precious talk? She would need to, because Mme. Rostov's talk frequently contaminates me, and I'm forty-four."

"Ah," said Jane, "it's age that counts!"

II

Jane Dench was sitting on a bench in the Luxembourg Gardens watching some children skip rope. In Paris, thought Jane, even the children were sharp and knowing. These wore the neatest plaid dresses moulded tightly to their straight little figures and flaring widely at the hem. A 'bonne' with starched white cap strings shared Jane's bench and served to show how absolutely differently two

people may do the same thing. She was also watching the children and sniffing up the clear morning air; but as she did so she gave an effect of extreme activity, — her watchfulness was to the last extent vigilance. Jane's watchfulness, though equally intent, seemed more concerned with some inner vision — a vision of which the children only pointed the moral and adorned the tale. Neither did Jane take the clear morning air into her lungs in quite so evident a manner. It enveloped her in a first haze of spring through which the winter coldness found it hard to penetrate. She opened her furred jacket at the throat; Paris wasn't St. Petersburg.

In the Luxembourg Gardens, Paris was at its best. The newer part across the river didn't please her half as well; that was the part which contained the smaller salon — the apartment which Mrs. Dench had snapped up at such a very nominal rent. Perhaps that was just the reason she didn't like it. The Luxembourg Gardens always brought before her the memory of a beautiful year which she had spent near them at a funny little boarding-school. The school was very cheap, but incidentally very good, and she had been extremely happy there. It was the year before she was sent to the convent, and she had been happy there, too, but that was different. There — at the convent — they didn't take the scholars out every bright afternoon exactly at three and let them play in the Gardens. They did at the little school, in batches of twelve, dressed in black alpaca and with their hair brushed smoothly back. Jane remembered how they looked, all those dark little French children, and among them she herself, tall, and by contrast blond. Sometimes those most favored of fortune were allowed to

make purchases of the old women in the booths — wonderful purchases of tops and confections and queer wooden dolls. That was ten years ago, and the booths, from a distance, hadn't changed; close at hand they were smaller and shabbier, and the wares they displayed were less alluring. But what could you expect for one sou — two sous — sometimes fifty centimes? You still got a great deal for your money in Paris, though not as much as formerly. Jane remembered the inexhaustibleness of a twenty-franc piece sent by her mother in lieu of that lady's company at Christmas. The returning holiday makers had been made green with envy at the stories of reckless extravagance told by the few children who, like Jane, had not left the school. There were advantages in waifhood — waifhood modified by twenty-franc pieces.

It was the sort of morning which inclined one to dwell upon advantages, and Jane felt that her own were greater than she had at times supposed. Her nationality was one, and the way — because of it — in which she could wander about unattended and unmolested. To the Frenchman — impertinently disposed — English and Americans were a law unto themselves; they went out alone and they didn't expect to be bothered; they consequently weren't, and Jane could sit there on her bench beside the streamered 'bonne' quite as if she were a little milliner's apprentice. Her sense of contentment was great. She was glad, after all, that she lived on the other side of the town; it made of this charmed spot a place to come to. She felt sure that nowhere else in all Paris was the air so springlike and the children's voices so amazingly shrill.

"Un — deux — trois — quatre — cinq —" They

counted as they skipped. Faster and faster the rope circled round them, and when at last they stopped breathless with a triumphant "quatre-vingt-dix!" Jane clapped her applause. She would have liked to applaud all the hurrying people on the long paved walk; in the distance she especially noticed a young man in a brown suit who swung his cane. Their hurry made for her leisure. She could sit quite still and watch. Her wooden bench was a throne before which her kingdom passed in review; she was the Lady of Shalott gazing into the magic mirror.

The young man in the brown suit amused her most. He was probably an Englishman. No one but an Englishman could be so big and at the same time so jaunty. This one had all the jauntiness of an Englishman newly arrived in Paris. She wondered that he should be in the Luxembourg Gardens when the Bois was open to him. The words of a song popular in her early childhood came into her head.

"As I walk along the Bois de Bologne
With an *independent* air,
You can hear the girls declare
That he must be a millionaire —"

She found herself humming it. The song went on most touchingly. The girls sighed and winked their other eye, and it finally appeared that the singer and object of these attentions had broken the bank at Monte Carlo.

"And *I* to Monte Carlo went
Just to get my winter's rent.
Dame Fortune smiled upon me as she'd never smiled before —
And I have lots of money. I'm a gent!"

Jane would never have accused the young man in the brown suit of not being a gent in that meaning of the word at least.

It was evidently the only one, however, for he had stopped before her and lifted his hat. She had a rushing sense of the imminent disagreeable; but she looked up squarely and met his eyes.

"Why, Mr. Parrish!"

"Miss Dench."

"I thought you were an Englishman."

Ralph Parrish laughed. "You didn't think of me as anything, as just now you didn't know me."

"Well, you see I had it all arranged that you were an Englishman and why you were, so knowing you was a surprise."

"Don't you ever know Englishmen, and do you usually bestow so much thought upon strangers? May I sit down?" He had done so before she had a chance to reply; he had a way of considering things of that sort settled beforehand.

The 'bonne' got up and left them.

Parrish looked at her as she reseated herself a short distance away. "She doesn't like us?"

"She doesn't understand English," said Jane.

"And you do? You understand all her misinterpretations — all her reasons?"

"Why, of course. She thought you were what I believe you call in New York a masher, and she thought I didn't mind."

Parrish stared. "In Europe you take things for granted, don't you? The doctrine of original sin and all the rest of it —" He seemed comfortably to stretch himself to this doctrine as he crossed his well-turned legs and laid his cane upon his knee.

"Well, you see," said Jane, "in Europe there are so many things to be taken for granted — dreadful things."

"Oh, come, you're too pessimistic; it's surely not worse than America."

"I don't know America."

"And you do know Europe? And here I am discussing morality with you. What would your mother say?"

Jane ignored his question, and when she at last spoke it was contemplatively rather than boastingly. "Oh, the subjects that people discuss with me!"

"And it all rolls off you like water off a duck's back? You are a marvellous child. But that's because you've been so beautifully brought up. Your mother's a marvellous woman — I take off my hat to her."

"Every one takes off his hat to mother."

"On your account?" smiled Parrish.

"Oh, no, on her own. I don't matter."

"When a pretty girl says she doesn't matter —" Parrish's manner conveyed a hint of the situation's hopelessness. Then he looked up at her out of his handsome eyes, and the situation wasn't so hopeless. "You're a marvellous child, and you're exquisite."

"Is that the sort of thing you say to Mme. Rostov?" No one but Jane could have achieved it without impertinence.

Parrish was visibly embarrassed. "Why, I tell her the truth just as I'm telling it to you, or I'd tell it to your mother. But as you're all very different, the same things wouldn't apply to you — the same things wouldn't be truths. So, no, it's not the sort of thing I say to Mme. Rostov."

In the unlike Jane there suddenly arose an unconquerable impulse. "You're a gay deceiver!" The words, with their burden of coquetry, were out of her mouth.

It was the one thing needed to complete her companion's

reckless ease. "Isn't that what women are supposed to be for?" he asked.

"To be deceived?"

"Yes, to be deceived."

"Imagine mother!"

"Oh, you'd have to get up pretty early to deceive your mother."

"And me?"

"I should hate to try."

"That's because you'd have mother to answer to."

Parrish stared. "You know you take a fellow off his feet." No newly arrived Englishman could have been jauntier.

"Yes, you take a fellow off his feet — and to think that when I saw you last, you were a little girl in short dresses!"

"Yes, I remember. That was one of the vacations when mother could have me."

"She made a great point of having you," said Parrish. "She'd talked about it for months before; and when you finally appeared, with the convent pallor still fresh, she led you before us — 'This is my little girl' — To remember you then, and now to see you!"

"I've changed?"

"To use a bit of New York slang which you probably have never heard — you've won out."

"That's sweet of you."

"Tell me," Parrish presently asked, "what is your mother going to do with you?"

"She's going to marry me."

"It should not prove difficult."

"Well, you see she's particular and I'm particular and we're not particular in the same way."

"Your particularities, combined, exclude from the lists almost every one?"

"Exactly."

"Why won't you take me?"

"I should be delighted; but I'm not sure of mother."

"How could she ask for anything better?"

Jane caught his spirit. "She couldn't — possibly."

"It's a pact?"

"A pact."

Jane was enjoying herself immensely. It was the kind of talk with which she was very familiar from the point of view of the spectator, but with which a closer contact had never proved successful. She had usually shrunk from the closer contact, and now she surprised herself. She had talked to men — talked to her mother's friends. She had had the longest talks with little David Barlow; but it was difficult to be really happy with one whose whole attention was given to some one else. While Ralph Parrish, however much he might be absorbed in Mme. Rostov or even in Mrs. Dench, had a certain largeness of capacity — especially now, when his energies were not taken up by the requirements of wholesale fur dealing; for he had finished his labors and was taking a much needed and much deferred rest. Jane had not been far wrong when she had discerned in his distant, cane-swinging figure a certain holiday demeanor. It was still in the gay spirit of holiday that he continued to address her:—

"If it's a pact that you should take me, that I should take you off your mother's anxious hands —" He looked from his companion's laughing face to the populated stretch of paved walk — "If it's a pact, what a pity it is that there

lacks an opportunity to seal it. Oh — I beg your pardon. I'm afraid you think I've carried the joke too far."

Jane had taken talk of the pact lightly enough, but at mention of the sealing, she turned helplessly scarlet. The blush was accomplished without consciousness of embarrassment; that followed after, and with it shame and a second scarlet flood. The subject of kisses was among those which people had discussed with her, for in spite of Mrs. Dench ever present to be answered to, that lady numbered among her friends many whose enterprise exceeded their caution; but it was a subject with which she had proved herself fairly competent to deal. Her beautiful innocence was tempered with a kind of superficial experience. It was an experience, however, which didn't include the holiday humor of youth. Youth put the thing in a new, strange light. She was a moment in conquering the scarlet, a moment in getting to her feet.

"Won't you walk home with me?"

"It strikes me you're very forgiving."

She gave him her most conventual smile. "Not in the least."

III

Parrish not only walked home with her; he stayed, at the invitation of Mrs. Dench, to lunch. Besides Parrish, that hospitable lady to-day grouped about her midday board the Duke and Duchess de Clopin and M. Gadillon. The Rostovs were conspicuous by their absence. "Had I known you were coming! —" she intimated to Parrish that the omission would not have occurred. He accepted it manfully. There was a time in his glorious leisure for

everything. Two weeks more of strolling about with his hands in his pockets, and then back to the city of work. "You don't know what it means to me, this glimpse of a place where work isn't the only thing in the world!"

Mrs. Dench searched back in a dim memory of America, and doubted if it were quite as bad as that.

"Yet, it is — it's an eternal pull. There's no let-up. Over here you have time." He was sure.

M. Gadillon agreed with him about the mistake of a too prolonged effort. He spoke as one who knew, for he had lived in America one whole winter. The height of the buildings impressed him.

Conversation ran on, touching lightly here and there. One of their number, the Princess Karina, was paying a visit to New York, and from her letters it was plain she found it as much a city of pleasure as Parrish did of work. Parrish had seen her and verified this point of view.

"Of course if she had lived all her life in Northern fastnesses," Mrs. Dench threw out, "I could easily understand what a jolly place New York would seem to her; but as it is, what she likes there is quite beyond me."

"And yet," said the duchess, "you spoke the other day of sometime going there yourself."

"Oh, if I ever decided to go back, it would be for Jane."

"For me, mother?"

"Yes. Surely it wouldn't be for me!" Mrs. Dench leaned back a little in her big carved chair at the head of the long table. "Jane has a passion for America," she explained. "As she's had only the briefest look at it, it's rather queer — a sort of instinctive nostalgia. So some day — just when you're all least expecting it — we'll

pack our trunk. We'll follow in the princess's footsteps and pay a visit."

M. Gadillon was reassuring. "Oh, you will not mind it. The upper part of New York, — the shops, the theatres, the avenues, — it is not so very unlike Paris. It is down town that is so strange."

"And besides," said Parrish, "you know the Barlows."

"Yes?" His hostess was frankly puzzled.

"It's at the Barlows' that the princess is staying. If you were really nice to them —"

"Yes?" Mrs. Dench interrupted him.

Parrish carried it off with a laugh. "Why, if you were really tremendously nice to them, you know, — why, you could follow in the princess's footsteps still more closely!"

"And stay with them? I shouldn't think of so far presuming on my friendship with young Mr. Barlow. The princess is privileged. The princess is alone in the world and can do what she pleases. I am not alone in the world — far from it. It's plain you know nothing of the responsibilities of motherhood, Mr. Parrish." She pronounced it richly — 'motherrhood' —

For a moment Ralph Parrish had an impression of a woman quite other than the one he had known for several years past as Mrs. Dench. The Mrs. Dench he had known was essentially cosmopolitan and suave, occupying her slightly anomalous position in the world with an easy grace which made it for her eminently right. She was without protruding angles and limiting prejudices; her golden and rather prominent eyes could gaze as unabashed upon the nakedest savage as upon the most uniformed emperor. She was without country and without age — almost with-

out sex, if by sex was meant the usual flaunting femininity. And now something in those rolled 'r's' — something in her expression as she had replied to Parrish — made him see her as a woman, no longer young, whose well-kept house was in that part of the world known in America as the Middle West, and upon whom the responsibilities of 'motherhood' sat heavily.

All this was in the moment it took him to look away from her to his plate. His plate was of intricate design and harbored a comestible which surely was not of the Middle West — that might be safely said, even though its exact origin was effectively disguised. Parrish toyed with a morsel on the end of his fork, and noted the delicate tracery of the fork's silver. The doily beneath his plate was of lace; between its meshes the table showed its black mahogany. Then his appraising merchant's glance lifted to the room itself with its high ceiling and panelled walls. The long windows were heavily curtained and gave an effect of dimness which went to prove that Paris wasn't all gilt and sunlight. If it wasn't for the unmistakable foreignness and greater gorgeousness, Mrs. Dench's dining room bore a strong resemblance to the big room at Hornmouth after Emily Stedman had cleared away the metal tables. It was the room at Hornmouth spread for a feast; Miss Stedman's cousin saw the analogy, saw — also — the absolute difference of its inhabiting spirit. The woman in the linen shirtwaist who leaned back in the big carved chair and placed upon its arm her heavy white hand was Circe in the midst of her orgies. And then a view of that vast section of country known as the Middle West again obtruded itself.

Parrish's array of facts tottered. The silver, the cur-

tains, the blackness of the mahogany, the sleek-jowled serving-man who stood behind Mrs. Dench's chair, the dishes of fruit that were so like the dishes of fruit in an old tapestry, — surely these were facts, and facts congruous with the woman he had known. His repeated rehearsal of them, which might seem lacking in taste and erring on the side of the commercial, was really a sort of rubbing of his eyes to assure himself of his perfect wakefulness — a sharp pinching to fight off the absurd hallucination born of 'motherrhood.' And there were other facts — why, there were certain things he knew about Mrs. Dench! The things no one said, but every one was aware of; the reservations; the doors one did not open — and yet in not doing so, didn't one take upon one's self a great deal? Parrish fell into a tangle of doubting. The things he knew — his array of facts — again tottered. It was a tottering galling to his self-respect, for he had never been given to imaginations about his friends; he hated to brand himself as a suspicious old woman; it were better — almost — that his facts, disagreeable as they were, should stand firm. Surely his hostess was a little too suave and a little too easy; her surroundings, however accidental and however temporary, succeeded in always being a little too gorgeous; in her gilded salon the masculine element too greatly preponderated. Yet as for this last, there were the duchess and the princess and Mme. Rostov. Mme. Rostov — Parrish shook that in his teeth. But above all these there was the wonderful spotlessness of Jane. The value of that couldn't be overestimated, even in all that Mrs. Dench might constantly say about it.

Jane sat opposite her mother at the long table between

the duchess and M. Gadillon, Parrish and the duke flanking their hostess. After 'motherhood' there had been a pause which the duke now ended. "Do you know, it is a curious thing that in the year or two during which I have known young Mr. Barlow I have never once eaten a Barley Bun?"

"Oh, I have," said Mrs. Dench; "they come in boxes, fifty centimes at the English-American grocer's. I saw them in the window as I was passing with David, and I made him go in and get me some."

"You were cruel."

"David didn't mind. On the contrary, he was rather proud. I have yet to see the thing that David can't be proud about. He'd hate to be accused of not being, you know, — of being ashamed of his father's business. I had difficulty in restraining him from eating his buns in the street. He carried the package under his arm like a furled banner."

Parrish smiled. "I should think he would treat it with honor. The riches it has brought him in are fabulous. Why, in New York they have a house which takes up half the block, and if you know what that means — in New York!"

"You know them?"

"I think I told you that I dined there at the request of the princess."

"Is the princess free to request whom she pleases?" The inquiry was Jane's.

"Why, Jane! If she requested Mr. Parrish, wouldn't they jump at the chance?"

"Yes, mother, of course they would."

The subject of this discussion accused Miss Dench of not appreciating him. She assured him that she did. There

was in Jane's give and take a suggestion of her mother's ease.

"Didn't the Barlows, Mr. Parrish?"

"Didn't the Barlows what?"

"Appreciate you?"

"I'm afraid not, entirely."

"That's hard on *them*." She relapsed into silence.

Mrs. Dench again took up the thread. "I've heard that Mrs. Barlow, David's mother, is such a charming woman. You've met her?"

"Yes — when I dined there. She's very clever, very quick — what you call very American."

"She's like her son?"

"I really can't say. I'm hardly sure what he's like himself; he seems complicated. Are you sure?"

"What David's like?"

"Yes — what David's like."

Mrs. Dench's glance shifted to the foot of the table. "If you want to know what David's like, why don't you ask Jane?"

IV

The Duke de Clopin was ushered in by the same servant — sleek of jowl — who was in the habit of standing behind Mrs. Dench's dining chair. He was ushered in and left alone for a time amply sufficient for him to repent of his folly in having come. His was a fool's errand. He could no more turn Mrs. Dench from her course than he could, single-handed, change the direction of a great flowing river. She was going to leave Paris; she was going to America to live; and the only wonder was that she hadn't done so long before.

The duke felt himself inadequate to the situation. He faced it, and faced the great door through which Mrs. Dench would presently enter, much as a lion tamer new to the game faces the opened entrance to the cage. He would make a fight—do his best—and more than that could no man do. The platitude rose to his lips as he turned and looked out through the long French windows to the wide boulevard below.

'La Belle France' stretched before him. It seemed as if it were he himself who was leaving it. Mrs. Dench had known it and loved it. She had appreciation, she had understanding, she had sympathy, and the good God had given her an excessive charm. It wasn't so much a question of what she would do without France as what France would do without her, and the desolation of France came to a point in the desolation of the Duke de Clopin. He nervously smoothed the very round silk hat which, according to a fashion slightly past, he had not abandoned in the hall. He was, as always, exquisitely attired; his pointed beard was trimmed and combed, and his light gloves and slender cane were the perfection of the haberdasher's art. As he stood there before the windows, very straight and very tense, he might have suggested to indiscriminating Anglo-Saxon eyes the proprietor of a large dressmaking establishment come himself on the delicate mission of presenting a long-owed bill to a distinguished customer. His nervousness visibly increased. He turned from the window to a reinspection of the door through which Mrs. Dench was to appear.

The servant came in and laid a cloth for tea. The duke didn't like tea, but at that hour Mrs. Dench always had it.

It was a habit dating from a year which she had once spent in England; she had a tremendous capacity for picking up habits of that sort and making them her own. She had a capacity for making things her own, and often an utter irresponsibility about them afterwards; of this her leaving France to its fate was an example. She would never return, he felt sure. It was final — complete. But there was still the bare hope upon which he had come.

The big doorway in the end of the room changed from blankness and darkness to splendid actuality. The duke looked up with the hope in his eyes and addressed Mrs. Dench as Grace.

“Maurice —” She gave him her hand, over which he bent low. “I’ve been all day packing. It’s a task — the accumulation of twenty years! I had everything brought up from the warehouse and spread out in one of these innumerable rooms. I was dust from head to foot.”

Her visitor wasn’t listening.

“Grace, I have come to ask you to stay.”

“Stay where?”

“Here — anywhere; but not to leave — not to go to America.”

She had sat down and he was standing before her. There was in his manner a suggestion both of acquisitiveness and of anger; but she turned it aside as her wide mouth widened in a smile. “My dear, dear Maurice, isn’t that a rather strange request?”

“If you refer to my right to make it —”

“I don’t refer to anything of the sort. You ask me to upset all my plans — give up my stateroom — unpack my trunks —”

"Ah — it's more than a mere question of staterooms and trunks!"

"You ask me," Mrs. Dench continued, "to reverse a decision that I've arrived at after the maturest consideration — to disarrange my entire future. And in order, simply, that you may continue to have the pleasure of my society! My dear, dear Maurice, I am not sufficiently altruistic —"

The duke made light of the adjective. "Altruistic? I did not expect it."

Mrs. Dench waited. "You expected?"

"The heavens to fall, I suppose." Her visitor turned away. "Is there nothing that you would stay for? Nothing which would keep you?"

She came out with a statement remarkable for its irrelevance. "You know perfectly well that you're tied hand and foot."

"I believe you enjoy my bondage."

"Enjoy it? I deplore it. You get on my nerves, walking about; sit down."

The duke did so. "I think it's there that you touch the secret of your departure. I get on your nerves."

"Is that your motive in coming here to-day — vulgar curiosity to find out why I'm going?"

"Oh, you are ruthless — ruthless! You finish with a thing and you toss it away. That is why you are so powerful; you have no conscience, no regrets."

"You make me out like the car of Juggernaut. I'm really not as bad as that. It strikes me I'm not bad at all to let you talk to me like this."

"Why do you not ring for Auguste to show me out?"

"Because that's not the sort of thing that I do with old friends." Mrs. Dench was again smiling, and as the duke's surprise deepened he was caught up in the swirl of her laughter. He laughed in spite of himself, for hers came peal upon peal with the wide mouth open and a gleam of teeth and redness. He always saw her like that, with one feature dominant. Sometimes it was her eyes or the large, smooth oval of her face. It seemed as though his vision wasn't of sufficient range or strength to take her whole and unblurred.

She gave him his tea, and it was several minutes before he reverted afresh to his impending doom. "Lilla says that she will miss you."

"I know. She even came herself to tell me so. You don't appreciate Lilla. Ah — you think I shouldn't have said that! But the fault was yours for bringing up her name. My friendship for you and my friendship for your wife have always been so apart. When I said, a moment ago, that I deplored your bondage, you know that I meant nothing against her. I am not wholly ungrateful. Where should I be now if it were not for the Duchess de Clopin?"

"Just where you are."

"Literally, yes. Figuratively, no. Think what she has done for me."

"You do for yourself. She has done nothing but admire and adore you."

"Yes, but think what her admiration means. Much more than even yours — much, much more."

The duchess's husband had little to answer against that. "To you it means more?"

"Don't be an utter fool! It means more to the princess and the Rostovs, all the people who come here, Mr. Parrish —"

"And how much does Mr. Parrish's admiration mean?"

"To Mme. Rostov?"

"No. To you."

"It fortunately doesn't mean very much, for it doesn't exist."

The duke was incredulous. "His admiration for you doesn't exist?"

"I assure you, no. Why don't you ask how much it means to Jane? First Mme. Rostov — then Jane — I only come third."

"Oh, my angel — you third! —"

"Third, or perhaps thirty-third, for all I know. He doesn't get on to me at all. But the subject of Jane brings me to an answer to your question. I'm leaving for the reason I gave you all the other day at lunch — for Jane. You don't believe me? Nevertheless, we sail next Saturday from Havre — the first of March — which date we've carefully chosen because it's also the date of Mr. Parrish's departure, and we'll have the unutterable convenience of a man to look after us on the voyage."

"Does Mr. Parrish know?"

"Of course he knows. He's overjoyed."

The duke looked at the stunted orange trees which grew in the green tubs outside the windows on the iron balcony.

"Oh, my angel! What man wouldn't be?"

"If you think it's he I'm planning for Jane, you're quite mistaken."

"Perhaps it's he you're planning for yourself?"

"I only wish I was presumptuous enough. He doesn't look at me!"

"Is it to make him look at you that you're leaving for America?"

Mrs. Dench chose to disregard her guest's disregard of her given reason. She smiled. "When I come to the pass when I have to make young men look at me, I'll let you know!"

"Grace, Grace —" And for the third time the duke repeated, "Mon ange —"

CHAPTER VII

NATURE

I

As she lay, propped up by pillows, Emily Stedman could see through her fluttering curtains a square of sky which seemed to have hit upon the happiest shade of blue; and by raising her head ever so little she could see the ocean that stretched out beneath it and purred gently in the foggy winter sunlight. Everything does what it has to do gently in Ocean City. The sojourner finds himself in a place of no work, no worries, no fixed hours, no problems; in a place of inconsequent coming and going. He finds himself with the usually feather-like time weighing heavy. But, granted he is as other sojourners, — a seeker after health, — this heaviness of time is the thing most counted on to help his quest, the thing — also — most counted on to swell his weekly bill. In January there was absolutely nothing to do but to gaze out at the alternating brightness and dulness of the sea.

The sea purred gently. At last the Mother of Mysteries was securely harnessed to the uses of civilization; at last every facility afforded for her quiet enjoyment. There she was, outside Emily Stedman's window, and in storm there were breakers as far as the eye could reach; but the water which the nurse brought to Emily's bedside had run into

the pitcher in a clear, gentle flow, quite unsullied by storms and waves and bits of broken wreck.

The nurse bathed her face, and the salt sting sent the faint color to her cheeks. Dr. Jeffries had recommended Ocean City in almost the same breath that he had diagnosed her case; its comparative nearness to town, and yet — touched as it is by the Gulf Stream — its extraordinary mildness, made it the place above all others for her to come to. For the strength to do so, she had waited in a darkened room, and she now waited, propped up by pillows, to recover from the fatigue of the journey. It was now the middle of January, and she had been there since the first day of the New Year.

Dr. Jeffries had found her illness the result of overstrain. He banished "Mrs. Dallowfield." When Emily had asked him what he expected her to do with the leisure thus thrust upon her, — whether she was to learn knitting, — he had given her one of his sharp, quick looks and suggested that she learn laziness. She proved an apter pupil than she would have imagined possible. In town, with the darkened room and the pain that beat at her head like a hammer and sawed its way in jerking descent to the tips of her little upcurling toes, mere existence seemed a struggle the reverse of laziness. But here mere existence was the easiest thing in the world. To lie in the pleasant sunlight with a soft pillow under every aching throb and to watch the white curtains flutter — she would be content to do that forever. The window was open a full dozen inches, and the room was filled with a soft, warm, salty breeze. The breeze made the carnations on the wall-paper nod their heads; they were so big, so much bigger than any gardener could possibly

achieve, no wonder that the slender stalks were inadequate. A bowl of real ones stood on the dressing-table; Emily liked to see them reflected in the mirror.

The nurse, a young woman whose tight print dress seemed to incase an unresisting surface, found her a rather troublesome charge. She would lie for hours without stirring, and then suddenly demand the most surprising things — a pink bow to be fastened on her nightgown in the place of the blue one which already adorned it, or a book — when reading was forbidden her — to be placed by her side. The books she most demanded were her own "Cuckoo" and a translated edition of the "Discourses" of Epictetus. They bridged the gulf of the years as best they could, the the scarlet and the scholarly cheek by jowl; and whether it was the contrast that amused her or some resemblance indiscernible to the layman, the nurse did not think to ask. Bathing the brow from which these fancies emanated was more in her line. Miss Marden had the virtue of being very much interested in her profession; she regarded the life, and sometimes the death, which came under her notice entirely from the professional standpoint. But she took it off — this standpoint — to a certain extent at least, when she took off her print dress and went out every afternoon at four, the apotheosis of the tailor-made, to see the sights and get the air on the board walk. Emily looked at her then with envious eyes; she wondered — the thought struggled with the pain in her head — why it was that those whose vocation it is to care for the sick should always be so inhumanly strong. They were strong physically, but the constant contact with disease gave them mentally a kind of bias; it was only a great one, like Dr. Jeffries, who could keep

his soundness perfect. It was all nonsense, the ennoblement of a ministry to the suffering; the suffering dragged their servitors down to their level, and their level was low — Emily hated it with the passionate hatred of one who herself has trod it. She welcomed the coming of her be-ruffled little maid who sat with her when Miss Marden was out.

It came to Emily with a sense of shock that she was never left alone. There was always some one, either the maid or Miss Marden, and failing these, one of the servants of the hotel. What did they think she would do? Get up and clamber out of that sunny, curtained window? Her imaginative curiosity had got the better of her, and she had asked what was below. There was nothing below for fifty feet, and then a hard gravelled path. The time was near, she hoped, when she would reach the gravelled path in the usual way, by the elevator; but till then she could very well not bother with it. She would have to wait till the carnations on the wall-paper ceased to nod their heads. Miss Marden talked of that halcyon period and explained, also, the complications of the rolling chair. The rolling chair was an institution for which Ocean City was famed; a giant baby carriage or go-cart made of wicker, its especial point of beauty was its lack of unpleasant invalid associations — its use didn't stamp one; it was at Ocean City universal.

But she was very content to let the future, with its rolling chairs and its gravelled paths and its closer view of the Mother of Mysteries, take care of itself. The future was almost as blank as were the pads of yellow paper which she would send to town for the moment Dr. Jeffries recov-

ered from his prejudice against work. She realized dimly that at present the doctor's prejudice might be founded on common sense — her brain creaked on its hinges; her ideas were like garments bulging from the sides of a smashed trunk, and came and went in struggle and consciousness. But later the doctor's prejudice would be sheer quackery. The blank yellow pads were the only things the future held for her; the rest of it was all on a level with the present — all sky and sun and soft salt breeze, and blankness. The blankness was relieved by the shadowy figure of a problem — the great one of money. It might mean a return to Hornmouth and an acceptance of her Cousin Laura's invitation to live with her. The blank yellow pads were the ladder over that wall.

Mrs. Parrish had learned of her cousin's illness only through the medium of her morning paper; but she had the reprehensible feminine method of arriving at conclusions, and her jump this time landed her at a connecting link between that and her son's departure. Emily ill and Ralph in Europe. She scented a climax in the phenomenon which she neither condoned, approved, nor understood. An animated broomstick — an inactive spider — giving what strength she had to a field of endeavor which held for him not the slightest interest, it would seem as though the young man who would be fairly loyal for a period of years must have an ulterior motive. Mrs. Parrish's New England morality toyed with that; but it had its ramifications, — this morality, — and she joined her son in his dislike of the implication of wedding-cake.

She was spending the winter months with some friends in Boston; and when the news of Emily's condition had

reached her, her conscience, which, like her morality, had its ramifications, put her aboard the first train for New York. There had been nothing for her to do, however; she found the apartment in the late thirties teeming with doctors and nurses, and in their midst a guarded, darkened room. By her right of relationship a package of letters had been intrusted to her charge; she was to do with them as she thought best — read them — keep them — destroy them. She had used her judgment; but there was one over the disposition of which her judgment had retired, defeated. Her conscience had its ramifications, and the letter whose superscription bore her son's handwriting she had infamously bribed the beruffled maid to take to Emily. It was against all rules and all precedents. In doing so she had endangered her own as well as her cousin's life. It was the sort of thing that one might expect of a gambler, but hardly of the first lady of Hornmouth. But the first lady of Hornmouth came at it by way of her conscience, with perhaps a touch of that venturesome spirit with which her ancestors had embarked for a new world on the overcrowded *Mayflower*.

II

As Miss Marden entered the room, Emily thrust something out of sight among the closed pages of Epictetus; but the action had been too wavering to escape that argus-eyed young woman's notice. She came over to the side of the bed. "You know you mustn't write."

"I wasn't writing."

"You mustn't read, either." She turned to the beruffled maid. "You may go now; I'll stay with Miss Stedman

till dinner." She waited for the maid to leave. "Just think what Dr. Jeffries would say if he knew you were disobeying orders! What would he think of me? You see how it places me! I'm here to get you well, and if I don't... Why, I was thinking only yesterday that I would let you lie on the sofa for an hour; but if you disobey the doctor's orders, you won't be strong enough! Oh, well, we'll say no more about it."

Emily was unexpected. "I'm not sure that I want to say no more about it."

Miss Marden waited, slowly smoothing the crisp folds of her dress.

Emily watched her. "I was reading a letter — a letter from my cousin."

"But you're not supposed to receive letters."

"I received this one before I left town."

"Through what means?"

"Through his mother. My cousin's mother —" she answered Miss Marden's stare.

The stare crystallized to hardness. "That was scarcely the thing for her to have done."

"Pass in a forbidden communication across the lines? I suppose not; but my cousin's mother is a very remarkable woman."

"You're speaking of the cousin who's in Europe?"

"Yes."

"I've heard you mention him." Miss Marden put out her hand. — "Don't you think that I better take his letter and keep it for you till you're strong enough to have it?"

"What do you think's in it?"

"Why, I haven't the slightest idea! Come — let me put it away."

The closed pages of Epictetus were held firm. "Ah, no, I won't let you put it away; but wouldn't you like me to read it to you?"

Miss Marden allowed the strangeness of her patient's offer to sink into her mind. It was repeated, "Wouldn't you?"

"If you care to — if you'll then let me put it away —"

"I'll then let you tear it up! I've finished with it. You see you found it out too late. I know its disturbing contents through and through."

"I should think you would!" The pages of Epictetus had given up their treasure and Miss Marden held aloft a paper as worn and as crumpled as the one presented to Emily by the elevator boy on the eve of her illness.

"There. Now, if you'll bring over a chair and sit down! Suppose that you read it to me."

"You're sure you wish it?"

"Quite sure. Now begin."

Miss Marden read through with unction the elaboration of the steamship letter-head; she read the date, felt in her hand the thin foreign paper, and then turned to Emily half apologetically. "It begins, 'My own dearest Emmy' —"

"I know how it begins. Go on."

"As you say —"

"MY OWN DEAREST EMMY: If you will be out when I call you up, how am I to see you? How, rather, am I to hear your sharp little voice at the other end of the wire, and how are you to hear mine? I am off — you'll never

guess — to Europe. Furs, furs, furs. I'll bring you a collar to prove that I'm speaking the truth and to match your big muff. This isn't a bribe like the presents which the husbands in the farces give their wives when they've come home late. Besides, I shall be back before you know I'm gone. My going's not a matter of my own choosing; but I need hardly tell you that. To stay at home and worship at your little feet — even to eat your wedding-cake — would any man in his senses leave?

“‘Write me at the Paris branch; I shall be there most of the time. This must go by the pilot.

“‘Ever your cousin,

“‘R. L. P.

“‘Here I throw my reputation to the four winds of heaven and write ten crosses at the bottom of the page with the usual significance of crosses. You see, with so many miles of blue water between, you can't object. The advantage is unfair.’”

There was a silence broken only by the sharp bank-note crackle of the letter which Miss Marden folded and refolded. It wasn't until she had finished her self-appointed task that she asked the question uppermost in her mind, “When are you to be married?”

“I'm not engaged.”

“Oh.”

“I suppose you think that makes it still queerer that I had you read my cousin's letter.”

“Why, not at all.” Miss Marden had seen queerer things than that. “It's pleasant to feel that you have a devoted

young man even if you're not engaged to him, and your having me read his letter is a way of telling me all about it."

"I suppose it seems queer to you that I should have a young man?"

"Why, not at all. But don't you think that you better try to sleep?"

"I'm not sleepy. Give me the letter." Emily took it and tore it with surprising strength into small pieces. "It's not the kind of thing that if I die I should like left behind me," she explained her action.

"But you're not going to die!"

"Not now — of course — but some day when I've done all the things I've planned."

"Won't you try to sleep?"

Emily gathered up the torn bits of paper into the palm of her hand, picking them from the slippery silk surface of the bedquilt. "It's plain how much in love with me he is, and how he hated leaving." She brought out the lie bravely; it was a lie that Ralph Parrish would have had her take for truth, but it was too late. She remembered one thing vividly, like the screech of a whistle in the midst of a fog, the voice of the person in authority at the firm of wholesale fur dealers telling her that Mr. Parrish had offered to go. Emily could have stood anything but that. The torn bits of paper in her hand were so much evidence of his hypocrisy. Her own almost equalled it, however, as she turned to Miss Marden her bright, light eyes. "If he had his way, I should be in a position always to accompany him on his fur-dealing journeys."

"That you're not going to be married isn't his fault? Well, that's very nice."

Emily had buried her face in her pillow; and Miss Marden, after a moment's staring out into the rapidly increasing dusk, drew the shades and turned on the most distant and most protected light. She sat down, presenting to Emily's tear-blurred vision a neat striped gingham back, and brought forth from her deep pocket a little bag of sewing. She was soon deftly at work upon a garment so minute that it would seem to the inexperienced eye quite useless. It was to add to the comfort and happiness of a newly arrived niece — a niece whose position as the fifth child of a not too affluent father made additions to her wardrobe most welcome.

III

Emily was in the smooth state of convalescence, not well enough to be irritable, but quite well enough to be immensely pleased at being brought back to life. She took, in fact, an almost morbid interest in her fellow-creatures. She sat about for whole days in the parlors of the big hotel, with the inevitable novel and the inevitable light wrap, and it was a choice between her fellow-creatures and the Mother of Mysteries. The Mother of Mysteries alternately roared and purred. Emily wasn't yet quite strong enough to like her — seeing her, as she did, for the first time. Her gaze turned inward, toward her fellow-creatures; and they, scattered at random, a sparse dozen occupants of the sun parlor's two hundred and fifty cushioned wicker chairs, were mostly an unedifying spectacle. Women, with here and there what Mr. Meredith calls 'a certain limp order of men'; and children, pathetic and thin-legged, who, wrapped and muffled beyond all semblance of humanity, played in

the health-giving sand: these were the inhabitants of Ocean City, the fellow-creatures that were given Emily to interest herself in.

But many people in a small place are nothing in point of constant contact to few people in a large place. The sparse dozen occupants of two hundred and fifty chairs day by day close in their ranks. Otherwise their sense of isolation turns more and more to a sense of impending doom. They feel like the early comers at the theatre, and the great blank curtain and the patches of empty seats are the repeated first note of the dramatic suspense. Ocean City in midwinter, with its long, clean stretches of emptiness, its bright, hard sunlight, its wonderfully successful escape from the odor of carbolic, was a great machine prepared to take care — as hotel men say — of thousands, and in February the thousands had not yet arrived. There were other elements besides the sea which seemed harnessed to the uses of civilization; and civilization had gone farther than that; had, for once, gone beyond human need. Nothing had ever before been so swept and garnished to the point of being positively cleared for action. And then action was the one thing forbidden.

That is the corner-stone of Ocean City's success — the preparation for action denied. It creates energy and then stores it away; the pressure of strength becomes higher and higher. It's the place beyond all others — this much-perfected civilization — in which to become a vegetable; the place in which that difficult process stands most robbed of its difficulties.

But for Emily this didn't entirely hold good. She had resources within herself. Day by day, with her returning

strength and her stiffening fibre, her gaze turned more and more inward till even her fellow-creatures were left far without. They seemed to do nothing but sort over their various ragbags of ailments, and Emily's own was so very much fuller that she didn't consider theirs worthy of a single inquiring finger. But ailments were, at their most numerous, stupid; and Emily's inward gaze was directed rather at those parts of her make-up which were unimpaired. So far she admitted that she'd made a mess of it; but there was always the future. On the title-page of the "Discourses" of Epictetus was a translated quotation from Marcus Aurelius: "Consider thyself to be dead and to have completed thy life up to the present time; and live according to Nature the remainder which is allowed thee."

If one excepts the usual modern association of the word 'nature,' that was—after all—the lesson she had learned. She knew that in her own way she had had Ralph Parrish; and now, in spite of a million 'Dearest Emmys' and ten million crosses, she knew that she had lost him. She had never before realized how much her possession of him had been a part of herself. Now that part was necessarily dead. It had been buried decently and with ceremony during the weeks which she had spent upon her back, propped up with pillows. She could look upon its grave with coldness, and her enervated fancy even summoned to it a certain mild disgust. Her disgust was more for what might have been than for what had actually occurred. There had occurred so very little. It would formerly have been characteristic of her to have regretted that. But now, with her new exaggerated sense of moral values, she was glad that the grave covered so few rotting bones. Graves of that sort

were usually well filled. But it was a sort that few people, looking at the pale little woman with the hollows under the eyes and the drawn formation about the mouth, would have suspected her of possessing at all. She was hardly the type of the unhappy heroine of romance. Those late bugbears — the spinster look, the invalid's shawl, the stiff-starched clothes — were discovered to have virtues. She would have liked to procure the rope shirt which had once been little David Barlow's ideal of a garment. She had blindly, and without being able exactly to track it down, the desire to immolate herself upon a sacrificial altar, the instinct to purge herself of her imaginary sins. And it wasn't because she believed in a hereafter and eternal damnation. The pendulum had swung, and she was clinging to it as firmly as when it had been at the opposite side of the clock. As she looked across at this opposite side, the decent burial and the newly made grave didn't seem to her a sufficient barrier. It was the kind of soul climax which in Catholic countries fills the convents.

The large, dim interior of a church, with incense and candles and the organ loud and low in the midst of the quiet, and the robed figures of priests whose seeming smallness made significant the insignificance of man in the presence of the Infinite — even that palliation was outside her grasp. She had the misfortune to have been brought up in an atmosphere of science, — in the distant worship of an abstract moral ideal, — when an ideal so concrete as to verge on imagery would have suited her best. The strain of barbarism which her cousin had been clever enough to decipher would only have had to be carried a little farther, and she would have found nothing unsuitable in the exorcising of

the evil spirit by the beating of tom-toms. As it was, she would have felt securer in some manner of protected and sanctified ground. The abstract ideal left her cold. The egotist's God is within himself, and with her the greater part of that was buried. She was left as religionless as she was rudderless. She felt very strongly that she had yet to find herself, and at her age she felt that it was time. Even her faith in the future tottered. It wasn't so all before her as she had supposed. What guarantee had she that that 'remainder which was allowed her' would be any less wasted than what had gone before? Wasted — she used the word with all the emphasis, all the fluency, which had formerly gone to the service of "Mrs. Dallowfield."

She had suddenly, in the very different surroundings of the hotel sun parlor, the sharp recollection of a small, shabby room with a table laid with a white cloth and roses and a student's lamp. She remembered the reddish amber color of the mixture in the cut-glass pitcher, and the green leaves floating through it like the fishes seen through the glass sides of an aquarium. When Dr. Guthrie filled his tumbler, they came out like fishes over a waterfall. Dr. Guthrie, she remembered, had filled his tumbler uncommonly often. He drank her health — the festivity had been in honor of her fifteenth birthday — and the health of the college year, then drawing to a close. Dr. Guthrie's speech had been the climax of the occasion: "When the day comes for us to 'answer to our good Lord for the use we have made of our sojourn upon this earth, we may say — we may say, that for us this earth has been merely as the winding pattern of a Persian carpet — for us nature has been but so much

material for our thought. We have wasted our lives in the pursuit of unpursuable things —”

It came back to her with sufficient clearness, the impression that phrase had made upon her. It was surely not in pursuit of unpursuable things that her own life had been wasted — in pursuit, rather, of what Dr. Guthrie had called the damnably normal. And the damnably normal hadn't been with her a success.

The apartment in the late thirties, which was like nothing so much as the inside of a milliner's bonnet box, typified to her the thing which another turn in the road might have made wholly hers. Fate had thrust her out of the way of the engine, but its hot passing breath was still in her face. The thing she had missed was the damnably normal; for her it was that which had proved unpursuable. She remembered the boy Ralph sitting beside her, big and blond and silent, slowly consuming his second portion of her birthday cake — not wedding-cake, this time, but wonderfully like it in construction. She supposed that he was a part of the nature to which the learned doctor referred.

She had once called the big room at Hornmouth a desert swept by a cyclone. It had been quite as impersonal — quite as abstract as that. As abstract as the immortal mind of R. H. Stedman and the secrets of the less immortal body which were so bound up with it that even when R. H. Stedman died and the metal tables and the pink masses in the glass jars were taken away, the room still held its former suggestion. That had been the second rising of the curtain, the period of “The Cuckoo,” the tireless struggle to escape, like the struggle of an animal caught in a trap. Then came the late thirties, with celebrity and Ralph Parrish and

"Mrs. Dallowfield." In looking back, "Mrs. Dallowfield" occupied an unfairly inconspicuous place in the procession. "Mrs. Dallowfield" was the fine unfinished flower of genius, the glow from the living coal. It was "Mrs. Dallowfield" who consecrated the apartment in the late thirties, consecrated it as she consecrated Emily's possession of Ralph Parrish, that part of herself whose fresh-made grave she could regard so dispassionately. It was the danger of graves, the things which might be accidentally buried in them. Emily's genius was in its very nature elusive — it might have slipped in along with the falling earth. That part of herself concerned with the possession of Ralph Parrish was so awkwardly mixed with "Mrs. Dallowfield," and "Mrs. Dallowfield" *was* the genius.

But 'the remainder which was allowed her' was to be consecrated in a new way. This was the new act — again the theatrical metaphor — the new rise of the curtain. Emily looked about at the empty chairs. The act had evidently not yet begun. It had a setting as impersonal — as abstract — as the big room at Hornmouth. This was in its favor, for the late thirties had been a triumph of the personal, the concrete. Her little apartment had been called 'bijou' until the decorated walls must have rung with the adjective — 'the bijou expression of her own bijou personality.' And then the generously proportioned Ralph had pulled this intensely bijou habitation down about his ears. She would never go back there.

Far better than that was this polished, swept expanse, with the empty chairs and the sense of blankness. In one corner there were a pertinent number of ladies playing bridge. They did nothing to disturb the quiet; they

barely moved a muscle of their dull, white faces, and their speech — hushed and spasmodic — sounded remarkably unlike human intercourse. As Emily watched them she wondered if it was the real end and aim of this highly perfected civilization that dull, white-faced ladies should play bridge undisturbed and another, who didn't play bridge, should repair ravages done to a system hardly worth repairing. Perhaps the coming crowds were a pleasant fiction, a fairy story which the owners of this marvellous place amused themselves by telling. The owners were probably a dignified group, whose fortunes were already made, and Ocean City was a harmless fad of their declining years — as some men have greenhouses or model farms. Usually, however, the owners of such places spend a good deal of their time in them; and in February, save for flurries of week-end activity, Ocean City was singularly free from the presence of the uninjured male. The injured were there, a limp little handful, who evinced a tendency to hide away from the possible sight of their more fortunate fellows. Occasionally a plaided cap and a steamer rug might be seen in the sunny recess of a piazza, and in passing the stair which led down to the billiard room, there might sometimes be distinguished the sharp click of ivory.

Emily, far from objecting to this lack of masculine society, rather rejoiced in it. She shouldn't much care if the glimpse of plaided cap and steamer rug was as near as the opposite sex should ever again be to her. And men, shorn of their strength, never seemed quite like men to her; her ideal of manhood was so bound up with her ideal of Ralph Parrish, and he — shorn of his strength — one's wildest imagination couldn't compass it. The plaided

cap and the steamer rug were symbols of limpness and injury; in fact, it was presupposed that any man coming to Ocean City in February for a protracted stay, branded himself as a non-combatant — one of the wounded carried in the carts on a march, thrown in haphazard among the impedimenta.

There was a climax in the game of bridge. The players' voices rose to a compelling pitch, and Emily turned her head. As she did so her attention was caught by a figure whose chief claim to it was that it appeared to have arisen out of nothingness. She could have given her oath that a moment ago there had been no one there. She had been looking at the bridge players and thinking of them, and then her eyes and thoughts had wandered, — or become more concentrated, — and now there it was, halfway between herself and the card-table, directly in her line of vision — the seated figure of a young man reading a newspaper.

His back was towards her and his bent head was turned away; but in spite of this, the thing — after the mystery of his presence — which most struck her was his utter lack of anything approaching limpness. He gave, for all his stillness, an impression of extreme alertness, and the two attributes were not generally so markedly combined. Emily experienced the same slight shock with which she might have come face to face, around a corner, with a more than ordinarily lifelike group of waxworks. The uncanny stillness and the uncanny alertness and the distinctness so defined as to suggest brittleness, — the edges of his coat, she noticed, were very sharp and dark in the morning sunlight, — the idea, unmistakably conveyed, of an exceedingly clever marionette: all these phenomena were of a character

to hold the attention which the apparent suddenness of the young man's arrival had originally caught. Emily stared at him much as she had previously stared at the bridge-playing ladies. Her curiosity — never dormant — was aroused; her interest in her fellow-creatures expanded to include him. She felt sorry for him in spite of his alertness; he was so sharp and fine, and from the thinness and whiteness of the hand which was visible to her, he might have been as ill as the limp gentlemen in the plaided caps. It was just his little inhuman quality, which was probably his way of being limp, that added to his intensely dramatic effect. He might have lately passed through the forging, tempering fires of the nether world, been moulded and chiselled and set upon the stage as a puppet, the labor of whose making mounted to extravagance.

Emily was sorry for him, and she found herself wondering what, if his back were so exceptional, must be that side of him which with cleverly managed puppets is generally most shown to the audience. As if in answer to her thought, he folded his newspaper and rose, turning uncertainly. She got straight to her feet.

“Why, Mr. Barlow ! ”

CHAPTER VIII

L'IMAGINATION SENTIMENTALE

I

"Do you suppose they're real?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; but if they are, and you want them, it's an opportunity not to be missed."

"You know, real ones — real moccasins — are the most comfortable things in the world."

David Barlow and Emily were lingering in front of a gayly decked booth purporting to contain the handiwork of a savage race. There were other booths — the whole walk was bordered with them — but they mostly, at that season, presented an unattractively blank exterior; they were nailed up as tightly as miniature arks, as tightly as though they were about to be launched in the ocean which spread out before them some twenty yards away. These booths were generally for rent or for sale, and there showed through their freshly painted surfaces a veiled hint of past owners — past occupations. It was only occasionally that one was found ready for the stray early worm; and it seemed as if even these had arisen at the summons of a false dawn — at the summons of the famous Ocean City air, which carried with it such a sense of the coming spring. The booth where the savage trinkets were displayed was the most thoroughly awake of any. Its proprietor, the trace in whose blood

was well emphasized by costume, eyed the occasional passer with an unflagging energy. When he found two people who bade fair to purchase some of his most expensive wares, it was an occasion to bring forth the exercise of all his skill. His price might rise, but not to a prohibitive height; the correct gauging of what would just fall short of it was a bit of clairvoyance not to be despised.

"Ver' fine, ver' fine. Me sell many."

His hawkish eye was passing in rapid review from the overcoat in the pockets of which David Barlow had thrust his gloved hands, to the neat, strong shoes that incased that young man's neat, strong feet. Yes, he might be rich; he presented to the world such an unrumpled surface — though this, after all, might be a quality inherent within him; and the proprietor was accustomed to young men, who, if they were rich, displayed it more unmistakably. And the lady — one could tell a great deal by the lady — was of an inconspicuousness which verged on the insignificant. On the whole, no — David Barlow was adjudged not rich. The price named was little more than fair.

"I'll take one pair," said the lady, and it was strangely she who brought out her purse.

"Oh, come! This is my party —"

"Indeed, no."

"But indeed, yes."

"I saw them in the first place — I stopped — it is I that shall wear them."

"It would offend you if I insisted?"

"Almost that."

"Then I can't see but that I must sink my own wishes. But you surely won't mind if I also buy moccasins?"

"For yourself?"

"No, for some friends who — as they aren't here — can't very well be so scrupulous." He turned to the proprietor.

"I'll take two pairs, and of a larger size."

The hawk eye gleamed. Its error was proved by this further prodigality of buying, but it might yet be retrieved.

"The larger size — they cost more."

Gleam unexpectedly met gleam. "Oh, no, they don't!"

"They cost more."

"When you gave the price, no size was stipulated." Barlow set down his money upon the counter. His gesture was final. "Take it or not — as you please —" And then to Emily — "I dislike being cheated."

Emily presently returned to her former contention. "You understand how it is about the moccasins? You see it's very different, you're getting them to give to friends who aren't here; but if I'd let you pay for mine, I should feel them on my conscience as well as on my feet every time I wore them. It's the principle of the thing, as it was the principle — not the actual fifty cents — that mattered to you now about the price of the larger size."

David was carrying them under his arm wrapped in two separate packages. He laughed. "You're the most conscientious person I've ever seen; but, believe me, I do understand your point! To be really frank, isn't it partly their being moccasins, which are nothing more or less than bedroom slippers, that would make my presenting them to you a too intimate privilege, a kind of liberty?"

"In a sense, yes. But you see that doesn't explain my full approval of your getting them to present to friends who aren't here."

David smiled. "Well, that would hardly be your affair, would it? It doesn't somehow touch you so closely. And besides, they wouldn't be apt to pay *me* for them *after* I had brought them to them as a gift. That would be a shade of conduct too fine-spun even for you."

"No, my conscientiousness doesn't extend to that. I'm afraid you think me prudish, but I assure you I'm not. I could even see the view of some one who didn't agree with me at all. For them, their view might be equally right, and I shouldn't think any the less of them for it."

"For them their view is right."

Emily looked up. "When you say 'them'?"

"To whom do I refer? Why, to the people whose view you said you were broad enough to see — those whose conscientiousness hasn't had an awakening."

"It's a question," said Emily, "which every woman has to answer for herself."

"The question of being presented with moccasins?"

"Yes, practically that. But I suppose you think it absurd that a little old maid of a hundred years old should make such a fuss about it."

David was thinking of something else, for his reply was hardly gallant. He reached a familiar conclusion — "It's age that counts. After a certain age those things are regarded differently. One has a larger liberty. Now you wouldn't expect a woman of forty-five —"

"But, my dear young man, I'm not forty-five! I'm not even thirty-five —"

"Ah — you misunderstood me grossly! Did I ever say you were?"

Something in his manner and in the tone of his voice

made her look at him harder than was her habit, and the result of her investigation seemed to be shown by her next words, "You're almost as tired as I."

"I, tired? Never."

"It's like you to deny it, and to swear solemnly that you're not here to rest, but for the pure joy of it. But you know one doesn't come here for the pure joy of it; you are tired — terribly tired, and I'm afraid I've walked you off your feet."

"What a liar you make me out! And isn't it I who have walked you off yours?"

"Shall we return to the days of our infancy?"

"And get ourselves wheeled back? I think that for me that would be rather ignominious; but for you —" David broke in upon the revery of a negro chairman who was disconsolately gazing out to sea. "You're not engaged?" Upon receiving the desired answer, he gave the name of their hotel.

Emily, as she was helped into her promptly gotten conveyance, tucked in and bundled up, had a sense of having been skilfully diverted from her object. There had been something which she had been about to say, — something which her thoughts were on the point of leading her to, — and now for the life of her she couldn't think what it was. She was inclined to the opinion that David Barlow was a remarkable young man. He was really in no need of pity — in fact, he seemed rather startlingly capable of taking care of himself. His acuteness had quite escaped her in New York; he had been so worn and so white, with his restless eyes and the suggestion of pain which he always had about him — so carried along by the swift current of some invisible exigency.

But now he was like a man who rode it gallantly, steering his well-riveted craft and raising aloft as a protection from the elements all his shields — inhuman — acute — alert.

He was bent on making himself agreeable. His attentions shouldn't end with a care for Miss Stedman's physical welfare. As he walked by her side he chatted gayly, drawing her notice from one to another of the sights and sounds about them in a manner that showed him at once amusing and observant. "One has it to one's self now, but at Easter — have you ever been here then? — why, it's a swarming mass." She would have known that he objected to a swarming mass. "Do you know," he went on, "what I call it in this country? Not the Great Unwashed, but the Great Newly Washed. On all sides are signs of recent scrubbing, recent brushing, recent powdering. Think of their ancestors!"

"They don't suggest ancestors."

"Hardly. Though I'm sure I haven't the least right to be snobbish about it."

"But you have a father —"

"Yes, a great one — and a mother. Don't forget her. And I have two married sisters; but they're not ancestors, are they? Not even a collateral branch."

"But they will be to your descendants."

"Oh, my descendants! — It's more likely," said David, "that I'll be to theirs. But we're becoming mixed. Genealogy is evidently not our strong point. We both have fathers, — yours was an even greater man than mine, — and you've been cleverer than I, for you've managed to shine for yourself in the midst of your father's light."

"I should call it shining quite outside it, but go on."

"They do illuminate a different area — 'The Cuckoo' and 'The History of Modern Physiology'; but I should think that if anything, 'The Cuckoo' illuminated the larger."

"But with my father it wasn't only the 'History' — think what he himself contributed to that history — the extraordinary discoveries that he himself made —"

"And you have made none? 'The Cuckoo' isn't based on your own direct investigations?"

"If I were not a hundred years old, you'd be exceedingly impertinent."

David Barlow laughed. "Oh, if you're a hundred, I'm a hundred and fifty!"

"Do you know, I believe you are!"

This conception of his age was one which he seemed wholly to accept. To Emily his youth was always patent; it colored his other characteristics and completed them; it was constantly reminding her that her own youth was a thing of the past, and that however white and worn David Barlow might be, he nevertheless still had his chance. But he took quite another view. It seemed that he had started out with a very definitely planned career, and then it had been cut short at its inception by circumstances unforeseen which had kept him on the other side and prevented him from finishing his term at Law School. She remembered having heard something of the kind from his father, but it wasn't yet clear to her why he couldn't now go on where he had left off.

He had thought of that, he told her one morning as they sat together in the great sun parlor, united by their mutual lack of knowledge of bridge — he had thought of that, but his plans were unsettled. He might return to college in

the autumn, and he might go to Paris — the French were a wonderful people — wonderful. It was the difficulty of Barley Buns, that they removed the actual necessity for labor, and unless a man had a pretty definite aim — why, Miss Stedman must surely see the tree it put him up.

“You look forward to a life of idleness?”

“I don't look forward. I'm unsettled. A man needn't believe in his life, you know, but he has to believe in his work. And my belief in mine has gone. I may get it back — I don't know — I may find something else. There are many things — fine things — open to a rich man's son. There are social reforms and charities, and always the immense political field.”

“You bar the making of more Barley Buns?”

“That seems hardly worth while, does it, when there are already so many?”

“Perhaps not.”

“And then,” said David, “it's an abuse of the gifts the gods have given you, to make Barley Buns when all these other things are open to you.”

“But if you let them also go by the board, is that not, equally, an abuse?”

“Oh, but I shan't! I'm not settled yet — I haven't decided. The law with me was always only to be a stepping-stone to politics. It's the personal power in politics that used to appeal to me. It doesn't now.” He spoke with surety — “I don't seem to care. I would be content if I had control of myself.”

Emily had difficulty in exactly following him. “And haven't you?”

“I don't know. Sometimes I think I have, and sometimes —”

"Sometimes don't think so much about it!"

She seemed very much in earnest, and he didn't at once answer her. "But if I don't think about it, how am I to know?"

"The people who have most control of themselves are usually the ones who don't know — consciously. And they are the great forces of the world. They're so tremendously occupied that they haven't time to bother. There may be certain finenesses that they miss; and some of them are occupied with good and some with evil; but they *are* the great forces. All this idle speculation —" His preceptor indicated just how idle she thought it.

"What would you have me do?"

"Go on with your work, even if at the moment you don't entirely believe in it."

"Ah — you do think me worthless! But I can't go on with my work. I don't think I've told you that I'm expecting some friends here. They arrive next week, Monday, the ninth of March. And if I went on with my work, I should have to leave, which I'm afraid would upset their plans."

"And aren't your own plans more important?"

"There was a time when I thought so."

II

David Barlow brought it out so simply that it hardly seemed a confession. His realization of its true nature, and consequent flood of embarrassment, came later when he caught the expression in his companion's face — an enlightenment like the clearing away of a fog.

"That's true friendship," she said, "sacrificing your own

convenience to the convenience of others. I hope your friends appreciate it."

"Oh, I'm sure they do. Mrs. Dench, especially, isn't apt to let anything escape her observation."

"And Mr. Dench?"

"There is no Mr. Dench. He's dead. The family consists of Mrs. Dench and her daughter. When they come, you'll surely still be here, won't you? I want you to meet them; they're exceedingly clever, and you're sure to be congenial."

"Is the daughter very young?" Emily asked.

"Well, no, she's five-feet-nine."

"Quite grown up!"

"Oh, quite! By which I don't mean that she's what is known as 'advanced.' On the contrary, she's very quiet."

"And they're coming here next week — Are they Americans?" Emily couldn't have told why she thought they were anything else.

"At heart and by birth, yes. But they've lived in Europe so long — in fact, Jane was born there — that I'm afraid at first they'll feel a little lost."

"I promise you I'll do my best to make them find themselves."

"Oh, if you would — I couldn't imagine anything nicer!" David's thanks showed him almost too grateful. But that he was aware of this came out in his very next sentence: "Not that they need a guide — they're exceptionally accustomed to looking after their own needs. Wherever they happen to be, they make it seem in a day as though they'd lived there always. Mrs. Dench arranges things! I think it was in Budapest that she took some hideous little

rooms in a hideous little hotel, and at the end of an hour, why, you would never have known them."

"The hotel or the rooms?"

"Both, really; the foyer was so crowded with waiting celebrities, and the rooms — they looked like a royal suite! Mr. Dench," David explained, "was in the diplomatic service."

"I suppose he became very famous, and now his family are reaping the fruits of his fame. For the daughter it's another case of famous father."

"I should say it was more a case of famous mother. Ask the Princess Karina — she adores her."

"Adoring her seems the fashion. And what is it — I feel that I can ask you because you've already told me so much — what is it especially about her? Simply great charm or great intellect or what?"

"You'll really have to see her for yourself."

"It's her beauty —"

"Oh, no, it's Jane that's beautiful."

"Then it's as the mother of beauty? But you said it was a case of famous mother."

"Yes, it's she — she herself. You'll have to see her and to know her. I first did so in the Mediterranean, near the island of Cyprus."

"A Venus Anadyomene?"

"Yes — yes — that's it! Venus arisen from the sea. She was on a celebrity's yacht."

"I should think that a yacht would be the only method of really enjoying the Mediterranean —" From David's slight self-consciousness Emily recognized the method as his. He had surely found Barley Buns as lucrative as she had found

them indigestible. "But you see it's only wonderful beings like the Denches who have at their beck and call all the luxuries —"

David cut her short. "I was afraid you were getting that impression."

"What impression?"

"You know very well the impression I mean; and it's emphatically wrong — emphatically not so."

Emily laughed. "My dear young man, there's no need of being so emphatic about it!"

There was a pause — heavy laden. Emily wasn't sure, after all, that little David Barlow was so capable of taking care of himself as she had thought. His cleverness — his alertness — had deserted him. He was stupidly floundering, getting himself with every step more entangled in the skein; and he now at her sharp pulling up suggested the terrier to which he had formerly been compared, after a whipping. But her pity, usually so ready for him, wouldn't come. She felt herself to be ruthless, and in the grip of a power which urged her to be more so. She had liked her young man — liked him for himself — she had been at the beginning of something very charming, an entertainment provided by the fates to cheer onward her faltering, recovering footsteps: an entertainment quite free from the objections and dangers besetting that other one provided in like manner for what might be called the period of her youth.

In liking David Barlow she was still fairly loyal to her new, changed attitude towards his sex. If far removed from that portion of it typified by the steamer rug and the plaided cap, he was equally removed from that typified by Ralph Parrish; and it was this last which Emily's new start

most proscribed. And that part of herself which was so lately dead and decently buried was given by him no impulse to stir in its grave. If cremation had taken the place of burial, he might be said to have risen — phoenix-like — from the ashes. It was an accident of birth that had placed him in the twentieth century, an accident of birth that his father was the Barlow of Barley Buns. He had really stepped out of an early French comedy, donning the garb of modernity to the accompaniment of soft laughter. The laughter, Emily knew, was not on his side. He would have been better to have stayed in his rightful period; modernity didn't suit him. She had heard vaguely that John Barlow was the only one who was proud of his son, and was thought to see with prejudiced parental eyes. He had started well, but Barley Buns were too successful — *he* didn't have to be. It wasn't, as the princess had said, necessary. Yet he was alert and he was hawkish — he was highly charming. He had risen, phoenix-like, sent by the fates; and now he was to be snatched away by a ranging lady of uncertain years and certain fame, the foyer of whose hotel was blocked by calling celebrities, and who had lived abroad so long that at first in her own country she would feel a little lost.

The only wonder was that her admirer talked of her so frankly. It was either very naïve of him — naïver than any young man of twenty-five ever was — or else very subtle. Emily began to suspect David Barlow of Machiavellian depths of cunning. He was even more worth while than she had thought. She had advised him to go back to his work; but that was as far as her self-sacrifice went; it didn't extend to advising him to remain and go over —

before her very eyes — to the camp of Mrs. Dench. Emily pictured a nervous clutching of the few remaining days.

Besides, she feared that Mrs. Dench would prove a too heavy load for her slim shoulders. And that she needed shoulders — however slim — was plain from her admirer's rather marked bid for them. But she had a daughter, and wasn't a daughter sufficient support? This one would be gawky and probably of an emphasized youth, a silent monument to the one-time existence of Dench, who, his widow might constantly remind one, had been in the diplomatic service. Emily had a faculty for projecting her imagination into the unknown, — illuminating with it the hidden corners, — and as the talk about Mrs. Dench had progressed, her imagination proved a faithful emissary. Her vision was vivid of a small, highly finished woman — preferably Titian-haired — with a *faux air* of being exceedingly well dressed and speaking many languages — even English — with exceeding fluency. She figured this charming creature as throwing a priceless scarf over a hotel table, tacking a priceless embroidery to a hotel wall, bringing out of a huge battered trunk a real Russian tea-service, and herself luxuriously reclining in soft, flowing garments; while the daughter, clad in a starched white muslin that had the air of having shrunk in washing, silently and awkwardly handed about nondescript cakes. The daughter gave just the necessary final touch.

The pause which had followed Emily's pointing out of David Barlow's excess of emphasis was finally ended by that young man himself. "I'm afraid it's been stupid for you — this talk about a woman whom you've never even seen. It's more than rude of me. I apologize." He

hesitated in a search for the right tone. "The Denches are the sort of people that their friends can find nothing better to do than to talk about, to marvel at, to praise. I'm sure you'll become one of the wondering number. You see," he looked up at her, — his capability of taking care of himself was again apparent, — "I like them well enough to want you to like them."

"When you know the Denches," Emily helped him out, "you're provided for for life? — All your stray bits of talk and of thought?"

Again his gratitude was touching. "Exactly!"

III

It was during the few precious remaining days — which seemed as unfruitful as they were fleeting — that Emily received a letter from her cousin, Laura Parrish. It was merely a repetition of the same old question, the same dutiful, cousinly offer. Now that Emily had been ill and now that she was so much better, wouldn't she again consider the invitation she had so often refused and come to Mrs. Parrish at Hornmouth? Wouldn't she take pity on a poor lone widow who had come to the shadowy slopes? Her path seemed fairly strewn with pity and with widows.

Mrs. Parrish had been one as far back as Emily could remember. In fact, her first remembrance of her cousin was of the first moment of her widowhood. There had been a riderless horse, a search too soon rewarded, and the strange apparition in the Stedman doorway of a white, staring face that wept and made other noises even less human, and that proved, upon investigation, to belong to Laura Parrish. Emily's attention had been more or less diverted from

disaster by Ralph, who at sight of his mother's extraordinary guise stopped short in his play and joined his protests loudly with hers. The protests had ceased. Mrs. Parrish had settled herself to a life like the glow leading from a conflagration. She was as inconsolable as Mrs. Dench. Emily remembered a portrait of the deceased — big and blond and bearded — which hung over the mantelpiece in his widow's parlor. He must have been, if that were possible, even a more exuberant specimen of masculine beauty than his son. His portrait was what is known in popular phraseology as a speaking likeness; the smiling face, seeming always to come a little out of the canvas, sometimes had the effect of coming even farther than that and following one around the room.

It was the thing most vivid to her as Emily reread Mrs. Parrish's letter, the thing that most typified the Hornmouth to which she had the chance of returning. She had once called her cousin's house the smile of the father of Pan. The appellation still held. And what had she, with her new exaggerated sense of moral values and her new rise of the curtain, to do with Pan? She was at breakfast, and she looked about her at the big, light dining room sparsely dotted with people as a new garden with plants. She watched the darky waiters sleekly and silently moving among the white-covered tables, unlading their overladen trays and responding to the morning greetings of their employers. At a near table there was an old lady in a knitted shawl who was consuming a vast quantity of muffins. She thoughtfully munched them and thoughtfully gazed out at the ever present ocean. There was another old lady, more modern, who read a newspaper

through round, wide-rimmed glasses, and ominously rattled it as she turned the sheet. It was a more fitting setting and they more fitting fellow-guests for a pale little authoress than even Hornmouth could provide.

Yet Emily had never before been so tempted to accept her cousin's offer. It had never before appeared to her in the light of a temptation; but then it had never been at one with the impulse to turn her cheek from a coming blow. Mrs. Parrish was leaving Boston for Hornmouth on the same day upon which Mrs. Dench was due to arrive at Ocean City. Emily could go out of one door while Mrs. Dench was coming in at the other; she liked David Barlow far too well to stand by while a woman like Mrs. Dench had him in her clutches. It was a chance — heaven sent.

But what of the chance to stay—to be in at the fight—to see the drama which the rising curtain would disclose? To watch David Barlow, ever repaying of watching, in the paces and convolutions that Mrs. Dench would undoubtedly put him through? And Mrs. Dench was a woman the like of which Emily happened never to have seen. She could for once immolate herself — though not on that sacrificial altar which she had so lately desired — on the altar of broadening experience. In watching David Barlow she could even forget that she liked him. It all depended upon her ability to regard the thing as a spectacle of which she herself was merely one of the favored and exceptionally closely seated spectators. She promised herself that she could; she would have promised anything; the undiscovered country was calling to her. The temptation, she suddenly found, was all on its side. She was face to face with it, and face to face, also, with the solution of her whole be-

dragged little life. Her cousin needed her. The two women would settle down together in the shadowy slopes — bury the hatchet and smoke the pipe of peace. She again turned to Mrs. Parrish's letter.

Somewhere in its neatly written pages was a sentence that came out of them very much as Mr. Parrish's portraited face came out of the canvas, "Ralph, as I suppose you know, gets back next week." She hadn't known, and the source of the information only showed what a prominence Hornmouth would give to the newly made grave. On his return the dutiful son would make one of his flying visits there to find Emily snugly ensconced. She felt now that she couldn't stand a repetition of his lie about having been forced to go. The bare sight of him couldn't be anything but painful. She hadn't seen him since she had cried out in the extremity of her checked passion for him and since she had come to look at the grave of this passion with coldness. But she knew how he would appear; her inquiring fancy took in all the details of his attire, from the very yellow travelling bag with which he always returned from a journey to the blue necktie that exactly matched the blue in his eyes. He would take up too much room; he would fill the landscape almost too handsomely. He belonged to a period at once earlier and more universal than that mirrored by French comedy.

Her path was barred on either side by an ordeal. On the one the meeting with Ralph, on the other the meeting with Mrs. Dench, and the spectacle of the injuries that unknown lady would undoubtedly inflict upon David Barlow.

That young man was following what seemed to be the

fashion in Ocean City, and reading the newspaper. It was propped, for his better perusal, against a conveniently shaped water carafe, and its contents so absorbed him that he hadn't given Miss Stedman his usual pleasant smile. He presented her, however, with the neat, fine outline of his profile. He looked young and sharp and so very far from decadent that he rather disclaimed his connection with the period which Ralph Parrish so antedated. He was young and sharp and the very finest essence of the masculine; his was a masculinity compared to which Ralph Parrish's was as the residue from which that essence had been refined. And still the suggestion — slightly inhuman — of a marionette, a figure in wax. Emily looked at him and was overcome by her own helplessness. Her new, returning strength made her chafe at it, and chafe at the convention that prevented her from getting up and going over to David Barlow where he sat at breakfast and picking him up and carrying him away.

IV

"You're getting well; but you're not getting well fast enough." Dr. Jeffries stood aside to let Emily pass out of her room, and his pronouncement was cut short by a difficulty that she experienced in locking her door. He had to come to her assistance, and it was a moment more, as there were people in the long corridor leading to the elevator, before he was free to go on with it. "You say you're a hopeless invalid and will never be well; but you know there isn't any necessity for any one's being a hopeless invalid — not any. And with you it's not a case of hypochondria, don't misunderstand me. Why, every time that

I examine you, I marvel at the things you put up with. You have grit — but have a little more — get well!”

Emily responded to all this by a question. “You’ll stay to lunch? We can have it now.”

“Thank you — just a bite. Then I must be off. I ran down especially to see you, and I have an engagement which makes it imperative, my being in town at five.”

“Even on Sunday?”

“Even on Sunday. Why, — I wouldn’t dare say it to most women, but I’m sure you’ll understand — I haven’t been to church except for a funeral in twelve years! That shows how busy I am. Do you think I’ve any chance of heaven? I’ve cultivated a habit of early rising, and I’m beautifully clean.”

“I believe those are the two principal qualifications. But a great doctor should be let in without examination.”

“Ah — I don’t approve of honorary degrees!”

Dr. Jeffries could well afford not to, with a half-dozen real ones to his credit. Yet he wasn’t at all the typical scholar — or even the typical physician. He was like a man who had lived his life a very long way from human ills; his eyes were like eyes that had gazed at far, sunlit horizons rather than at the printed page. He might, for this last, and for the tightish cut of his vivid blue clothes, have been a naval officer on shore leave; though for this last, had he been in the navy, he was of an age to have been retired. He was frequently mistaken for an Englishman because he spoke without a twang and had a certain brusqueness of manner.

“I can’t conceive,” he said at lunch, “of a better place than this in which to rest. In fact, I can’t conceive of a place half as good.” He smiled with his clear, light eyes —

"Yet I can't help feeling that there's something about it you don't quite like. Physically you're as much better as is possible considering that you're hardly improved nervously. You're living at a pitch that would kill most of us. There's a disturbing element somewhere; and if it's appurtenant to Ocean City, why, leave! If you say so I'll take you back to town with me in my machine this very afternoon — now — in half an hour."

"My things —"

"Why do you have a maid? But I see you won't come."

"I couldn't possibly. Besides, you're wrong. There's no disturbing element. I like it here immensely."

"And you don't think it any business of mine? It's sometimes hard for a doctor to remember that he's not a sort of miniature Almighty. But if you really want my advice, I think you've been here long enough. Go somewhere where it's absolutely quiet."

"But it's quiet here! You see it at a disadvantage on Sunday; people are down for the day and from Saturday till Monday, but I assure you that from Monday to Saturday it's as quiet as a mouse."

Dr. Jeffries seemed to take the assurance with reservations. "I've had patients," he told Emily, "who have been greatly benefited by a cruise on a freight steamer which carried no other passengers. Something might be arranged. If you're now living at the wrong pitch, that would at least change it."

The pun was execrable, but Emily took it up. "Change it? Rather. And would I finally be able to return?"

"Not to your original pitch — no. But you'd be practically well."

"Yet it would only be a very clever mend?"

"Yes, a very clever mend. But what more can you ask? And it rests with you, whether you're to give yourself the benefit of a very clever mend or remain a cracked dish laid away on the pantry shelf. Think of your work, save yourself for that —"

"I do."

"Then save yourself still more."

"Then there wouldn't be any work, I'm afraid. There's little enough as it is."

The doctor arrested in mid-air the passage of his fork. "Oh, if you look at it like that! It's not normal." There was a pause which he presently ended by regarding with suspicion an article of food that his patient was about to take up. "I wouldn't eat it if I were you. You're at least willing to do my bidding in matters of that kind, aren't you? Now that Miss Marden has gone —"

She cut him short. "In matters of what kind am I not?"

"You refuse — point-blank — to change the thing I call the pitch at which you live."

"But I couldn't change it even if I would."

"Ah, yes you could — but you like it too much. You get too much enjoyment. It's a form of dissipation."

"I should say you'd hit upon the wrong word, but put it so."

"Oh, I know what I mean — I know what I mean!"

Emily was afraid that if she followed his instructions, she shouldn't recognize herself; she would be mended, she told him, so cleverly that she'd be altogether new.

"And you wouldn't care for that?"

"With the greater part of me already dead, if the rest of me were new, why, what would I have left?"

Dr. Jeffries misunderstood her. "But that's just it — it would not then be dead. It would come to life — normal, splendid life."

Her answer was startling. "Heaven forbid!"

She was looking towards the door. David Barlow, as the last of a little group of people who were entering it, seemed like a solidifying of her thoughts.

The great doctor followed the direction of her look. "Of course, we all have our objections, but I can't say that I see yours. I never yet heard of anything better than health — even at the cost of being altogether new."

Emily wasn't listening. It was now apparent that the little group with which David Barlow had come in was bound to him by a closer tie than mere simultaneousness of entrance, for he had seated himself with them at another table than his own in the farther end of the room. The little group — in number hardly worthy of the name — consisted of two women, a young very tall one and an older one not quite so tall. In the brief near glimpse that Emily had had of them, the older had struck her as being educated and competent and dignified; she wore a very good gown, and walked with an ease and grace to which her inclination to stoutness only seemed to add. As they passed, the younger's face had been turned away, and beyond the fact of her being strong and tall and slim, Emily hadn't taken her in. The thought that rushed over her was how much these people — evidently relatives of David's — would interfere with the plans of Mrs. Dench, who was coming with her daughter on the morrow.

Something of this was conveyed in David's manner. His excitement — though suppressed — might have been of a

sort which a man has with a knotty problem presented him to solve before a specified and rapidly approaching hour. He was carrying his problem gallantly, with laughter and hawkish head held high, and as Emily watched him at the distant table, she had inconsistently the desire to help him out of his predicament. If she could have got his intruding relatives away, she would have done so willingly.

Dr. Jeffries was still looking where she was. "You say you wouldn't care for being altogether new. Now the pale young man and the large woman and — by Jove! — the beautiful girl — I don't wonder you stare — now, what would they care for?"

The question, meant in all lightness, had on her an unlooked-for effect — brought over her, suddenly, the sensation of rising tears — made something very vivid to her which before hadn't been so clear.

"I don't know, I'm sure. I wish to heaven I did. I'd give anything in life to know what one of them cared for."

The physician used an expletive so violent that its only excuse was sheer, blind wonder. It was proof of the size of the great room — the appalling privacy which Ocean City, among other things, provided — that no one stirred.

"You haven't yet definitely said whether you'll take my advice."

"I can't leave. It's as you say, I get too much enjoyment where I am."

"Then there's nothing I can do. You've made your choice." He, too, was staring now — staring at David Barlow — "Ah — believe me —" he turned full about — "believe me — that's not the way to get well!"

CHAPTER IX

THE REMARKABLE YOUNG MAN

I

"THE Denches have come. They're over there by the big sofa, and extremely anxious to know you. Of course I realize that it's hardly tact to bring you up to Jane; but then, on the other hand, would it be so to bring her mother up to you? Won't you simply waive ceremony?"

"Need you ask?" said Emily, and then irrelevantly — "They came a day before they were expected, didn't they?"

"Yes, almost straight from the steamer."

The women who were standing a little distance away in the dimness of the hotel sun parlor at dusk were the same women whom Emily had seen at lunch. She had — all at once — the sensations of relief, bewilderment, and disappointment; and an odd sense of waiting, as if, in spite of anything that David Barlow might say — and he should know — the real Mrs. Dench and the real Jane had not yet arrived. They might appear at any moment, the Denches of her preconceived idea — the mother a little worn, perhaps, but considering her certain years worn wonderfully well; the daughter starched and awkward and angular. But as the moments fled and they still didn't, Emily was left to reconstruct her shattered fancy as best she might.

It was Mrs. Dench who presently herself waived ceremony

and advanced to meet her across the wide, carpeted floor. But Jane was in her mother's wake, and it was Jane whom Emily saw first. Her impulse was to challenge David Barlow — "Why didn't you prepare me — why didn't you give me some semblance of warning? And after all our talks!" But Jane had her hand in a firm short grip, and she was left with only the little inward take of the breath which accompanied with her any too violent emotion. Instead of the starched awkwardness of her vagrant fancy, she found herself confronted with a grace, a charm, a color, a symmetry — she hunted in vain for a fault. Jane had the untouched quality of newly fallen snow or the ocean at early morning — the quality which one was immediately afraid wouldn't — couldn't — last. And nothing to come could be so good. Even the loss of her abruptness, her young angularity, would be a change for the worse. The clear, jewelled eyes; the long mouth, not too red; the supremely simple nose and smooth, slim cheek; the straight line of throat; the voice softened by contact with many languages; it seemed an appallingly rich treasure box from which these could be drawn haphazard. But Jane Dench didn't suggest a treasure box, either rich or poor. She was — instead — a tall young sapling, that somehow didn't sprawl, and had caught in miraculous perfection the line of beauty.

There was something else that Emily wished to say to David Barlow — another charge to make; though this time of a nature complimentary. She wished to tell him that he'd been very clever — he had been more deeply subtle, even, than she had thought — and she would have liked to ask him why he'd been at such pains to be so clever —

at such pains to conceal from her the fact of its being Jane, and not her mother, who made the Denches what they were — and himself the most beautiful, deepest red. Jane looked at him straight, and then she turned her rather fixed regard upon his friend.

"It seems so splendid to get back. We passed through our own country, when was it, mother — ten years ago? — but we've been away so long that we can't believe it when we post our letters with American stamps!"

"Don't you like being away?"

"We like it very much — of course."

"We like everything very much," said Mrs. Dench; "we're wily, battered old diplomats, and everything is always right."

Emily caught at the word, 'diplomats,' as a drowning man catches at a straw. Mrs. Dench was a diplomat's widow — the word confirmed it. For her dignity she might have been the widow of a prime minister. No station would have been for her too exalted. In the place of Titian hair and the patched remnants of beauty, she had hair frankly grizzled at the temples and a general appearance making no pretence to loveliness. But she had a presence. Emily was inclined to spell it with a capital 'P.' It was a presence in itself carried to a point of high art, redolent of European courts and a civilization perfected through centuries — a presentation of herself, an ease of manner, which went far towards lessening Emily's disappointment. The reconstruction of her shattered fancy was already begun. She found it a task not unworthy.

"Our trunks have come," Mrs. Dench was saying, "and I think we'd better see to them. You'll be here at dinner?"

I never feel capable of any rational conversation till I unpack my trunks — not that there's anything in them — but it's a moral support, knowing that one's few rags and trinkets are home again."

"Mr. Barlow's been telling me that you work the most marvellous transformations — turn cottages into castles —"

"We're certainly very clever at it," — she included Jane; "we have to be. Over here they give you a telephone, an electric light, a brass bedstead, and a scrap basket. Over there you get anterooms, corridors, white and gold salons. Here they're so afraid you won't know they're modern; there, they're so afraid you won't know they're old. Well, we'll see you later." As Mrs. Dench smiled, Emily discovered where Jane came by her length of mouth. She watched her as, still in her mother's wake, she went down the long vista of the room, looming off into the dimness. It was to Mrs. Dench, however, that her next words referred:—

"Tell me, in every country does your friend speak not only the language, but the vernacular?"

"She speaks whatever she likes." David Barlow was also gazing at the end of the room through which the mother and daughter had made their exit. "She's not in the least what you were prepared for, is she? You're disappointed. You were prepared for I don't quite know what."

"Disappointed? Never less so!" Emily laughed. "I'd rather counted on a mass of red hair —"

"Why don't you say frankly that you'd rather counted on a woman dyed and painted?"

"Hardly that!"

"You see, it's as I said. Mrs. Dench is exceedingly quiet."

"And isn't Jane quiet?"

"Jane doesn't have to be anything else."

"She doesn't, does she? What with a mother and a beauty. Why didn't you tell me it was Jane?"

"It?" he objected.

"You know quite well what I mean."

"Oh, but it isn't!" he brought out.

"You imply that she's merely the lamb led to the sacrifice — the beautiful votive offering — the maiden chained to the rock?"

"I imply that she's nothing of the sort!"

Emily was aware that she had in some way trodden upon a guarded grass patch. Where Mrs. Dench was concerned David Barlow seemed given to overemphasis; but she respected the grass patch and this time let it pass. She told him her impression of the Presence — how she admired it, and how she felt sure she should admire it more and more. "A woman," she said of Mrs. Dench, "with a mind —"

David was pacified. "Yet she's a creature of action — not of theory."

"I can see that."

"*She's* one of the great forces — you remember our conversation of the other day? — what you said of idle speculation, how the really great ones were so tremendously occupied that they hadn't time to bother? Well, Mrs. Dench is less given to idle speculation than any woman, who — as you say — has a mind, I ever saw. She's as you say, Venus arisen from the sea. You have a way of putting things — you hit upon the right word, the right phrase.

Venus arisen from the sea —” David sincerely commended her for her aptness in this one, and Emily didn’t remind him that it was coined before she had seen the lady whom it was supposed to define.

“You say —” Emily brought out — they seemed to hurl back each other’s words — “you say, or rather you intimate, that Mrs. Dench is tremendously occupied —”

“And you wonder at what? I suppose she really isn’t, in the strict sense of the term, except for looking after Jane and doing the innumerable things that women do — shopping and arranging their clothes and all that. But it’s an occupation for her to be herself. She’s action — she’s force — she’s vital and splendid —”

“Ah — you’re the most remarkable young man! —” Emily’s voice narrowly escaped harshness.

II

“Mr. Barlow tells me you’re *the* Miss Stedman.”

“I’m afraid the other ladies of the name of Stedman wouldn’t admit it.”

“They’d have no right not to. The extraordinary thing is, you know —” Mrs. Dench paused; “the extraordinary thing is that you should have written a book that I wouldn’t let Jane read. I don’t care what she reads behind my back; but when she comes to me — out and out — well, she never got beyond the first chapter, did you, Jane?”

“No, never.” Jane smiled.

“Oh, if she finished the first chapter of ‘The Cuckoo’!” said David Barlow.

“She might as well have gone on? Not at her age, David.”

It was after dinner on the day after the next — the intervening one having been spent by Emily flat on her back — and the Denches and David had come in from the dining room to find her in almost sole possession of the big sun parlor. She had been sitting there trying to read by the light of a gayly shaded lamp — a little lonely and a little depressed — since she also had come in from the dining room some half hour before. She had gone through with the full ceremonial of dinner, her darky waiter more assiduous than ever, and her desire for nourishment less. It was better, however, to be downstairs among the lights and the wide spaces than upstairs in the company of the be-ruffled maid, who sewed eternally and who rocked eternally in the rocking-chair that she had asked permission to carry into her tiny room that opened out of Emily's. Emily had watched her through the opened door for what was little short of two whole days — watched her and listened to the whining French song with which she helped to speed the hours now that her mistress was well and wouldn't be disturbed. It was true the carnations on the wall-paper had ceased to nod their heads. But Emily had come down — down among the lights and the people and the wide spaces, and if she felt a trifle lost and a trifle at sea without the charming escort to whom she had so rapidly become accustomed, it wasn't anybody's business but her own, and she could keep a bold front. She had answered her cousin Laura's letter in the negative, and she therefore had a sense of having burned her bridges behind her. A bold front was the only possible one. The Denches and David Barlow found her more than usually gay.

"The question of age —" she spoke in reference to Mrs.

Dench's remark to David, — "the question of age does, I suppose, make a difference."

"Oh, immense!" Mrs. Dench seated herself beside her, and she couldn't help a certain retrospective amusement at David's request that she make the path of the home-coming exile smooth. The exile was already so much more at home than she — so easy and so competent and so utterly without need of protection or care. Emily could see that upon first acquaintance she hadn't begun to appreciate her or even to see how much there was of her to appreciate. The let-down from her preconceived vision had been sharp. For that matter, it still remained so. But she had of her attractions the infallible feminine proof — David Barlow was in love with her, and David Barlow was a young man whose taste she respected. The attractions must be there. If she still couldn't help taking them a little on faith, it was a perfect faith.

She smiled at Jane. "Yet they say that America is the paradise of the young girl — all the books are written for her — all the plays —"

Mrs. Dench broke in. "Ah — if you call the young, unmarried American female, a young girl! Those that I've seen reminded me of either boys or fools or something for which in France we have no polite name. And it goes without saying that 'The Cuckoo,' or even a work far more elaborate, couldn't do them harm."

"I see you've no love for the American product."

"Quite frankly, I haven't. In fact, the proper bringing up of my own young girl —" the mother placed a hand on her daughter's shoulder — "was my strongest reason for spending so many years on the other side."

"Just as now," said David, "you're coming back on her account."

Mrs. Dench looked at him with a momentary sharpness. "Exactly so."

Emily supposed it part of Jane's proper bringing up that she was as unmoved — as detached — during this intimate discussion of her as though she had been both deaf and dumb. Her mother's censorship of her literature didn't quite seem to extend to the things that might be said before her. But perhaps she was girded against these by the armor of innocence with which her proper bringing up had enchaind her. Emily imagined that it would be necessary in Europe, an armor of that sort; and it was the demand which had undoubtedly created the supply.

"Mr. Barlow says you're coming back on your daughter's account — I hardly see —" Emily paused invitingly; she found Mrs. Dench's methods inconsistent.

"Jane became very homesick, and I feel that she's now in a position to choose. You see, *with* her bringing up America won't hurt her."

Jane unexpectedly came to life. "I'm immune!"

"And warranted," said David, "not to come out in the wash."

"Will there be a wash?"

"Mondays — always."

"And you're backing me?"

"Down to my last cent."

"Then I'll do my best."

"Thanks."

It was now Mrs. Dench who was oblivious; her detachment was even more perfect than had been her daughter's.

They carried the relation of parent and child to a very high point. It was perhaps a different conception of this relation from that familiar to Emily; but she had never before seen a conception so thought out. It reminded her of the very perfected ideal of it set forth by Confucius, the great prophet of the Chinese. Confucius was a gentleman whom she had met with in the course of her scholarly browsings, and he had a rule of three for every relation in the whole social organism. He started from without rather than from within; he believed that the first step towards virtue is to assume its aspect, and he set down this aspect very precisely, he left nothing undefined. He was the prophet of the older civilization, as Mrs. Dench was — to Emily — its priestess — a civilization older and older and older; why, Mrs. Dench went back to the beginning and was Venus arisen from the sea. Emily had for it David Barlow's authority. And Jane was the maiden chained to the rock. Andromeda the daughter of Venus . . . To Emily belonged the distinction of establishing in mythology a new relationship.

III

"Jane and I pile ourselves into one of our little cubby-holes, and then we have the other for a place in which to gaze at our own souls undisturbed. In a hotel, you know, one is usually entirely occupied in gazing at other people's; but we've lived in a hotel so much that other people's souls have rather lost their novelty; while our own —" Mrs. Dench paused.

Emily wasn't sure that they either of them had a soul, and she happened to be entirely occupied in gazing at the soul

of David Barlow. That seemed a tangible, definite thing; and hadn't lost its novelty. From where she sat on the little gilt-trimmed sofa that Mrs. Dench had brought with her, in some miraculous manner, from Paris, she had a fairly good opportunity for observing David Barlow's soul — at least as much of it as was visible to the naked eye. And it struck her there was visible a good deal. She had sometimes watched the progress of food down the transparent gullet of a young bird, and had the same impression. It seemed really as tangible and as definite as that. The hammered bronze exterior was, after all, only an exterior. Her imagination didn't balk at a bronze statuette luminous from within.

As David hovered over Mrs. Dench's real Russian tea-service — that part of Emily's prophecy had come true — he might have been a young husband, invaded by friends rather prematurely, and doing the honors of his new house with suppressed excitement. His excitement flashed forth in bright sparks from underneath his apparent calm — his apparent air of being absolutely at home. Any one would have been at home in that charming, drapery-hung room; hung in light, soft, foreign stuffs it was, and the hotel carpet covered with light, soft rugs. A few really good pieces — a vase of Chinese porcelain, a water color attributed by many to the great Watteau — were made to show to their best advantage; and for the rest, the commonplace, dark-stained furniture didn't much matter. The French sofa raised the general level of that, and there were books — books with yellow paper covers and covers of limp black leather. The limp black leather predominated. The Denches were very religious in a sacerdotal, ritualistic sort

of way ; Jane, even, had serious leanings towards the Church of Rome. She had contemplated it with wistful eyes more than once, but on the afternoon in question she seemed to be more occupied in contemplating David Barlow.

Emily's regard encountered hers, as is natural when two travel the same road. Mrs. Dench's seemed also to take that direction. There was one particular moment, when the road towards the young David was positively blocked with gazing, which reminded Emily of that moment among a box full of ladies at a theatre when a man appears in their midst. They all turn with their light, fine dresses and sweeping plumes, and he — black-coated and insignificant — awkwardly receives their homage; the difference being that she and the Denches were not in sweeping plumes. But it was an occasion which deserved them. She had saved up for it all day in order to be bright and fresh, and at the appointed hour, in a frock which had memories of the period of the late thirties, and with her sharp little nose well powdered, she had walked down the length of an endless corridor and made sure of the number on the door before she gently tapped. The number on a hotel door had always seemed to her an extraordinarily unimportant method of marking the difference between one planet and another. Two closed doors, side by side, and they were as alike as peas in a pod ; open them and you had the entrances to separate human habitations. She wondered if horses had the same sense of variety about their stalls.

She had tapped and been told to come in. She found David Barlow already there, and the graceful, tangled length of Jane filling the gilt sofa. There was a brief instant before she got to her feet, an instant during which Emily

was conscious of having come into a warmer zone. Something had been said or was about to be said. There was an air either of recovery or preparation. Jane was looking at her mother's visitor, and he was looking at the Chinese vase — though this last was felt to be merely by chance.

"Mother'll be in directly. She was lying down, and the hour escaped her. My word! Aren't you smart? Every one's smart in America — what becomes of the old clothes?" Jane ran through her fingers a bit of the lace of Emily's sleeve. She herself had on a white dress not unlike the dress of the projected vision — only it wasn't starched and supposedly hadn't shrunk.

"But you're smart, too; and besides, you're something so very much better than smart. Isn't she?" Emily asked of David Barlow, but didn't kindle a responsive gleam. He explained — which hadn't been at all apparent — that he was trying to start the lamp for tea.

"Won't it light?"

"It will light, but I don't think there's enough alcohol."

"I'd help you," said Jane, "but I don't really know anything about it; I've never —"

"Jane mustn't touch it!" Mrs. Dench came in — "She'd blow herself into a thousand bits. Here, — I happen to understand it, — let me."

"You've seen it used in its native land?"

"Often and often. Don't you remember, Jane, that afternoon at the princess's when Mr. Parrish and Mme. Rostov were at the height of their affair?"

"And Mr. Parrish dropped his cup and it spilled all over Mme. Rostov's gown? Of course I remember."

Mrs. Dench made an odd transition. "Mme. Rostov's

husband has the best manners of any man I ever saw. He talked to me about Egyptian religion the entire afternoon."

"Let us all immediately talk to you about Egyptian religion," said David.

"It wouldn't signify — now. But if you were married, David, and your wife were brazenly flirting with a good-looking young American! — Well, M. Rostov had just reached that part of the 'The Book of the Dead' where the heart is weighed in the balance with Truth, when — smash — went Mr. Parrish's cup. He of the manners didn't move an eyelash — 'Ah — your countryman! — ' and then the heart and Truth went on."

"The princess always made her own tea," said Jane; "she was very proud of it, and it seemed — that broken cup — a frightful waste; but Mr. Parrish was so beautifully apologetic."

"Mr. Parrish was so beautifully everything. I entirely sympathized with Mme. Rostov. It was one of the most complicated bits of her complicated little life; but if I had the chance of a man like that, I'd be complicated, too."

"Ah — mother — if you had the chance —"

"He looked," Mrs. Dench said to Emily, "the way Apollo ought to have looked, but didn't. His eyes were the most extraordinary slaty blue."

It was at this point that David gave tongue: "You know, Ralph Parrish is Miss Stedman's cousin. They were brought up side by side."

Emily verified the news. "Yes, I shouldn't have let you talk on without telling you. I'd apologize if I had the faintest kind of an excuse to offer. It was one of those unaccountable lapses —"

"Not at all, the fault was ours. It only shows what I've always said to you, Jane, — only this time I didn't practise what I preached, — how unsafe it is to gossip. Not that we really had anything to gossip about. In Europe," Mrs. Dench explained to Miss Stedman, "there are certain things which are regarded differently — we have, over there, a tendency towards a broader view —"

"A view of which Americans in Europe take advantage?"

"To a certain extent — yes — the thing is unavoidable. One's eye becomes accustomed, just as in Paris one's eye becomes accustomed to the made-up faces of the women and the queer, tight clothes of the men." It was charming of the diplomat's widow so to put herself in the mere travelling American's place, and also to make Ralph Parrish's excuses at the same time that she made her own. "When a man's as handsome as your cousin, why, what will you have? Every woman on the spot is sure to be mad about him, and he'd be but a poor, inhuman stick if he didn't occasionally respond. You won't lay it up against him, you won't perhaps mention? You see, we're very good friends with him — he just now happened to be on the same steamer with us coming back, — the intimacy one gets into on a steamer is proverbial, — and we should hate to have him think we'd been telling tales out of school."

Emily assured Mrs. Dench that he'd never have the chance to think anything of the sort. It could very well pass without reference. In fact, she didn't know when she would see her cousin again; New York and business would probably hold him for many months to come.

"But Ocean City's surely not too far for a Sunday's

visit? We were given to understand that to be one of its chief attractions." Mrs. Dench waited.

"Ralph doesn't even know I'm here, unless his mother has told him. We're both abominable correspondents. He wrote me the merest line, and I haven't yet got round to answering it. But of what am I thinking? He'll be down to see you — of course —"

"It's just possible. But you know the fleeting nature of the intimacy one gets into on a steamer — that's also proverbial."

David Barlow, having set the ball rolling by his mention of the tie existing between the absent and the present, had been content to rest upon his laurels. He now, however, considered that the ball had rolled far enough. He thought to change its direction: "Parrish is such a striking chap; once having known him, even on a steamer, it would be hard to forget him. At least, the impression he would leave wouldn't be fleeting. There's something — something almost conspicuous —"

Emily laughed. "Oh, don't be afraid. He's quite frankly conspicuous."

"Conspicuous," added David, "in a very delightful way."

"You're right in defining the sort of conspicuousness," Mrs. Dench put in, "there are so many sorts. Jane, here, finds it conspicuous that we see so much of you!"

It came, a bolt from heaven — a pistol-shot in a quiet street. It brought them straight from Ralph Parrish to David Barlow, from Russia to Ocean City, from what was for most of them a somewhat distant afternoon to an afternoon as little distant as it is possible for an afternoon to be.

It brought Emily from an enforced digging among her newly buried treasure to a sniffing of the flowers which had fast grown up in the enriched soil which covered it. Her manners must have suffered by comparison with M. Rostov's.

"As if any one," Mrs. Dench went on to David, "could possibly mind our seeing you! As if we cared whether they minded or not! And yet Jane objects — in her opinion it's conspicuous!"

Jane's brows were cloudy. "That's what I was telling him, mother, just before Miss Stedman came in." Jane showed a certain seemly distaste for linen publicly washed. Her mother vigorously scrubbed it with an utter forgetfulness of the sensibilities of the passer. Though in this case, the only passer was Emily Stedman. She had sometimes seen the presence of a young child similarly disregarded.

Mrs. Dench didn't really forget her, however. She gave her a cup of tea before she replied to Jane. "You say you were telling him, Jane? It strikes me it's hardly your affair. If an old lady like me — battered and worn as I am — isn't capable of looking after herself and her family, why, I should be greatly surprised. I've somehow always managed it abroad."

"America isn't abroad."

The diplomat's widow smiled. "Jane's crazy about America."

David Barlow's regard had again turned to the Chinese vase. He was looking closely at its smooth, porcelain surface, evidently in a vain effort to decipher some characters deep under the glaze. It seemed he had the talent they all found so useful — the ability completely to detach him-

self, to sit unmoved in the midst of battle. He now turned and faced it. "America's a pretty good place. It never occurred to you, Miss Stedman, that it might appear out of the way?"

"America out of the way?"

"No, the Denches and myself."

"Why, of course not!"

When Emily left them, David Barlow was still there. He was a valuable, brittle object — as valuable as any they possessed. She feared his breakage. And in case of that, who would there be to gather up the bits?

IV

Emily had said on leaving that she was bound straight for her own room. She pleaded letters and sewing. But instead of that she went straight downstairs. Solitude didn't attract her; and her solitude, she felt sure, would be too greatly populated; she didn't feel herself up to coping with it. Even as it was, in spite of the backs and profiles of bridge-playing ladies and the occasional passing of a bell-boy, she still could see the clouded brows of Jane, her mother's easy, all-including smile, and little David Barlow — clear and fine and surrounded by women as a wrecked sailor by water. It was partly in his defence that she had come away; he had seemed to be having trouble enough without her. It is true she had looked over her shoulder, but her look fed on emptiness; he hadn't followed her. If he had, Jane and her mother could have fought it out between them.

She wasn't sure exactly what it was they were to fight. Her more vivid vision was of David and herself. She al-

ways had the last, and the vision of David of late spent a great deal of its time perched upon her shoulder. Sometimes the feel of it there amounted almost to a physical consciousness of weight. It was manifestly unfair that a mere chance acquaintance should so install himself. Though as for that, wasn't every acquaintance — consequently every friend, every one save those bound by ties of blood — tossed to us by chance? Emily wondered at the omnipotence of the Fates, and was brought back sharply by a kick from the perching vision. It clamored and sported with nothing to say it nay, the Denches its welcome playmates. A jostling human mass would have been far less insistent; and a jostling human mass was just what Ocean City, at that season, prided itself upon lacking. Later, when the crowd arrived, it would be a very different story; but now it was all long stretches and empty spaces and a cleanliness which verged on the medicinal.

Emily went to the window. The ocean was gray and opaque and pricked by flurries of snow. It struck her with a sense of relief that the place was vulnerable to such a thing as weather. It had been so made to order — so uniformly mild and sunny — and here was a southeasterly storm of the sort that must have existed since the beginning of time. Civilization was powerless in the face of it. She could hear faintly, through the inner, the rattling of the outer window glass, and far out to sea — a mere speck on the dim horizon — a little fishing-boat was fighting the elements. To-morrow there might be a wreck. There had been some early in the winter with strange objects washed in shore. But she had begun to think that, too, a myth—a pleasant, or unpleasant, fiction. Except her visions, every-

thing was doubtful, everything mythical. They were real and solid, and the most real of all was taking advantage of the growing dimness to bother her again. If it hadn't been for the necessitated change of costume and the nearness of dinner, she would have gone out into the storm. The salt wind and the surf and the stinging snow might have broken the image in her heart. In her concern with the aspect of the bright morning hour when she walked with the Denches and David, she had forgotten the aspect of hours less bright — forgotten, at last, all other aspects but that of Mrs. Dench's wonderful, jewel-like room and its great civilized setting.

But if she had gone out, she would have missed seeing Jane, and seeing Jane was a pleasure she never knowingly missed. She turned from the window to find her close, and looking at her in a preoccupied fashion — much as David, a while before, had looked at the Chinese vase. She must have blinked a little as her eyes encountered the light, for the first thing Jane said was to ask if she were sleepy.

"Sleepy? Never less so! And what are you doing so far from your own fireside?"

"I don't possess one. What, might one ask, are you doing so far from yours?"

"I don't possess one, either."

"I think there isn't one in the house," said Jane; "this whole place is heated in the most remarkable manner by a system of pipes."

Emily ventured that the term, 'fireside,' might not imply the presence of the actual blaze, and Jane didn't refute her.

"You see," she went on, "even if I had a fireside, — a real one, — it wouldn't really be mine. I'm not of age, and noth-

ing belongs to you till you're of age. It's held in trust. I know all about that! There are the most beautiful things being held in trust for me — a necklace that belonged to my grandmother Dench, and money enough to buy a cat and some knitting yarn and a little house somewhere in the very centre of America — Ohio, probably. Ah — then I'll have a fireside! I'll ask you to visit me, which I'm sure you'll love."

"And what will you have done with your mother?"

"Oh — mother!" Jane gave the first note of a laugh — "mother hates Ohio. She was born there."

"And you were born in Vienna?"

"Yes — how did you guess? Did David tell you? David's a darling, isn't he? We're the very best friends in the world, he and I. Of course, he's terribly young — not that he isn't years and years older than I —" She made another uncompleted attempt at laughter. "We were cruising about the Mediterranean and anchored off Cyprus — to get coal, I think it was — when we first discovered him. We were on the Duchess de Clopin's yacht and the Princess Karina, whom you said you knew, was there too. The princess got bored — it was rather her habit. Her boredom finally reached a point when something had to be done; and we welcomed the relief promised by the Barlows' yacht, anchored close by, and also with coal as an aim. We didn't know it belonged to them, — I'm afraid if we had, we wouldn't have been any wiser, — but it ended by mother's writing a note, using the princess's name as a sort of excuse for our impudence. The result was the Barlows, in the most marvellous little tender, all glistening brass; and sitting in the bow, a little apart, his dark head bare, was David.

I think from his pleasure that he'd been bored, too." Jane opened wide her long, slim hands. "Seeing him now — pale and drawn — you can't imagine him as he was then — bronzed from that tropical sun —"

"But I can! — I can perfectly —"

"Ah — you can?" Jane was reckless. "He's been through so much — he's been put through so much —"

"So much?"

"Paper hoops," said Jane, "the sort they have at the circus. They're pink and yellow, and sometimes green, and the pony gallops on as hard as ever he can and the clown jumps through and lands on the pony's back again all safe and sound. The ring-master cracks his whip —"

David Barlow had said that Jane was quiet. If this was what he called quiet — she was wound up as tightly as an eight-day clock, and all her talk had barely loosened the springs.

"You regard Mr. Barlow as a clown?" Emily asked.

"Oh, not a bit! A clown's awkward and ugly, while David — With some women if a man's small, it goes without saying they don't think him handsome. Now, with me —" she paused, "with me a small man's absolutely fatal. That sounds as if my experience of them had been vast, which isn't at all the impression I wish to convey, is it? When I'm firmly settled in my little Ohio house, I should hate to look back on a varicolored past. Though I assure you it could have been varicolored if people hadn't been so afraid of mother. She's taken care of me in the most masterly manner. Why, I've never even been in love! And I've never, never," she was smilingly bent on carrying things lightly — "had any one in love with me."

"Why, your path must be strewn with prostrate forms — and what of the people afraid of your mother?"

"They don't count."

"In a list of victims they should count. Even the clerk at the desk — the scrubby young man who's there in the afternoon — is transfixed when you go by."

"Ah — that's because I go by! Mother once said a clever thing about me — she's always saying clever things — and they're mostly about me — she said I was a decorative impression. A decorative impression —" Jane repeated it slowly and turned on her new friend her still laughing face. "Doesn't it hit me off to a dot?"

How long it was that Emily stood there by the window after Jane had left her, she couldn't have begun to say. But as she went in to dinner rather later than usual, it must have been for some time. Perhaps she wandered about a little and then came back, for she had the distinct remembrance of Jane stooping low over a bookcase — a bookcase which was not visible from her place by the window. She couldn't drive out an impression she had caught — the same that had made her quite impertinently ask what Jane was doing so far from her own fireside. She had had the air of being very far indeed — and without sufficient cause; the air of aimless waiting with which she might have whiled away an unexpected hour at a railway station. It was a little as if she had been rather perfunctorily obeying a command to run along and play. "If your mother and her visitor are taking up the parlor that should by rights be as much yours as theirs,— why, come to me! I haven't a Russian tea-service and I haven't a beautiful sofa, but I've crackers and jam and a fairly comfortable lounge. It will

be the cosiest sort of a time — two little girls together.” There was a moment when Emily had considered saying it.

If there had been anything that she could have really done for Jane, — any way in which she could have really eased her pain, — she would have been too glad. But she feared she might prove but a clumsy comforter, and her instinct of self-preservation verged on habit. She was going through enough on her own account. Like David Barlow, she had her stint of paper hoops, and she was tense with exertion. But David had youth and probably no perching visions; Jane also was possessed of the same asset and the same lack. As for the first, Miss Stedman was inclined, in the presence of so much of it, to overestimate its value. The second — the lack of the perching visions — was not a proven fact. The two who had youth might have them also, — they might be haunted and harassed as much as she, Jane by David’s and David by the vision of Mrs. Dench, — a heavier load than any — the very apex of visions.

CHAPTER X

MOTHER AND SON

I

RALPH PARRISH was sitting in his room at the Town Club surrounded by all the paraphernalia of travel. A rug, an umbrella, and a cane were made to form one of those happy families of circus tradition. A half-emptied bag lay open upon the floor. A trunk, strapped and locked, stood against the wall where the expressman, assisted by one of the Club porters, had lately set it down. The end nearest Parrish was well posted over with labels of foreign hotels and steamship companies and railways; they were the necessary final touch to the bright checker-board beauty of its exterior — the labels of wisdom without which a trunk is merely a receptacle for possessions. This one was especially designed for foreign travel — it had lightness combined with strength, and a hard, polished surface impervious to any but the most insistent scratches. And of these there were but few; as few — almost — as those maintained by its possessor. His was a surface equally impervious; and it was just because of this, just because of his hardness and his polish, that labels and scratches affected him in very much the same manner — they were the necessary completion of his newness — they made him fitter and readier than ever.

He sat there in his room at the Town Club staring about

at the visible signs of his journeying. It was only their number and variety that withheld his attention from those less visible. He was, at best, little given to introspection, and he now stopped short at a consciousness of fatigue. It was as near to fatigue as he ever remembered to have come. Never before, surely, had oak supported by steel yielded to his tread in simulation of a ship's motion; and never before had the glare of a bright March morning, reflected upward from melting snow, translated itself in his mind's eye to the glare of blue water. It was Sunday, and the wide avenue down which his windows faced was filled with people on their way to church. They walked slowly, in ordered groups of twos and threes, and Parrish caught the masculine gleam of silk hats and the glimmer of feminine plumes. They seemed prepared to take their worship calmly, more as a relaxation than an inspiration, a sedative rather than a stimulant. It was a part of the day's rest and a proven refutation of American excitability. Parrish, fresh from Europe, was in a position to make comparisons.

He would have been, that is, if he hadn't been far too busy. He had spent the previous day surrounded by customhouse officials and furs and the personal effects of the Denches, who were returning to their own land with the accumulation of twenty years. There had been dinner at the Palazzo Hotel, and after that the dauntless travellers had taken in a theatre. They had risen at what seemed close on Sunday's dawn, however, and by dint of a Herculean effort the feminine members of the little trio had carried out their original intention and left for Ocean City — their accumulations attached and uninjured. Parrish was

newly from this as he sat in his room at the Town Club, gazing about him. He had little more than time to catch a train which would get him to Boston late that afternoon. He would have several hours in which to see his mother, who herself was on the eve of spreading her wings for Hornmouth, and by starting from Boston at midnight he would be back in New York and could count on reaching the office of his firm of wholesale fur dealers early Monday morning. He had rung for a servant to help him repack his bag, and his speculations, his perceptions of the visible and invisible signs of his journeying, were all confined to the moment that he waited for an answer to his ring. It was a moment like the islands of safety in the middle of the crowded boulevards of the city he had come from.

He rose and stretched his arms above his head. He didn't really wish to go to Boston. The temptation not to was as strong as any of those with which he had lately dealt. But if he yielded — if he didn't go — it would be a question of going to Hornmouth, and that couldn't be for a disgracefully long time — two weeks, certainly. His mother expected him; it was his duty not to disappoint her. But his duty — or rather his sense of it — was weakened by his fatigue. It was a fatigue moral as well as physical; and to face Mrs. Parrish's mild eye, to submit to and return her maternal embrace, to tell her glibly all his news and to lend a sympathetic ear to hers — it was too great a strain for his fatigue to bear. He longed for the simple refreshment to his soul given by a Sunday spent in the smoking-room of the Town Club, surrounded by those of his own sex and age and occupation, — his own sex, especially. His world of late had been too exclusively peopled by women.

He even welcomed with uncommon friendliness the man who came to assist him with his bag — not, thank heaven, English. He thanked heaven that the Town Club had the independence of its nationality, and gave the preference of its employment to the native born. Parrish characterized foreign servants by a round American adjective. Perfected in service by the practice of generations, with a knowledge of their place gained in the same manner, they nevertheless were the owners of begging, extended palms that Parrish compared unfavorably with the fair remuneration for value received of his native land. And was it such an advantage — that knowledge of place? — even though one greatly sought . . . He preferred the uncertainty of democracy.

The man who was packing his bag asked him how he had liked Paris. "You've been there before, sir, haven't you? It must be a grand place. I wouldn't mind going there myself some day — get some gentleman who wanted some one to look after him. But I expect those situations is generally given to ones who can 'parlez-vous.' I have a friend who can talk French just like a Pareesian, and he got a situation to go all around the world with one of our wealthiest millionnaires. He sent me a postal from India." There was a pause and a smile of reminiscence — "It wasn't a patch, though, to the postal he sent me from Paris. It was as much as my reputation was worth. The fellows downstairs was all guying me. It was something fierce." He of the endangered reputation had his head buried in Parrish's now opened trunk, and he presently emerged with his search rewarded. "There — you'd better take two collars, hadn't you? Something fierce . . . Over here the police would have been down on the store that sold it like

a flash — but there . . . From what I've heard I wonder if they *have* any police." There followed an anecdote told behind a shielding hand.

"It's a different point of view," said Parrish.

"Yes, I guess that must be it. But you only touched the high places, I expect. You can hardly tell about things of that sort."

Parrish smiled. "Your friend who sent the post-card could, without doubt, tell more. But do you think that post-cards don't exist in the high places?"

"Oh, I'd never think that, sir. I've lately been reading a book about the wickedness of the European aristocracy. I always knew that even dukes and duchesses wasn't above their little bit of fun. Why, even here—well, we Americans don't let any too much get by us — but we've always got the police."

"You believe in the police, George?"

"Why, without the police where would you and I be?"

Parrish had turned to the window and was again looking out. "It's one of the few questions I've never asked myself, George. And yet — indirectly — it's the police that are forcing me to take the noon train for Boston. Oh, don't be alarmed; I'm not an escaping criminal! There's such a thing as the police of our own consciences."

George took a liberty. "I don't ever recollect your having talked like this before, sir!"

Parrish transgressed all the rules of etiquette and taste. "It's the result of too much feminine society, George."

George took it concretely, "One of those Pareesians — I know the sort. But I never heard — I never heard of

their affecting a gentleman like that." He suddenly straightened himself from his packing. He had the dawn of an idea, and cursed his former thick-headedness. "Wouldn't you like a bromo and seltzer, sir, before you go to the station?"

"You seem to think I'm drunk," said Parrish, and looked about for his hat.

II

Ralph Parrish never appeared so altogether charming as when he bent his strength in the service of the weak. Especially was this true of him when he did so in the service of his mother. Mrs. Parrish was in her later years a rather spare little woman with a mild eye and carefully dressed gray hair. She had brought up her son the way he should go, and now she could fold her hands and reap the fruits of her labor. What wonder if he knew how to assist her with her wrap — forestalling in that office the head waiter of the big Boston hotel; what wonder if his manner as they entered together the dining room contained just the right shades of deference, affection, and respect?

They were dining at a hotel, not because his mother's friends hadn't extended their hospitality to include him, but because there they would have a better opportunity to talk than would be possible at a family dinner-table. There would be so much to say. Even in the scanty hour which had elapsed since the arrival of Ralph's train, so much had been said, and Mrs. Parrish was still eager. The tie between the mother and son was a singularly close one. Mrs. Parrish had beneath her mildness a certain brute courage, and Ralph had beneath his strength a certain mild-

ness — an aspect almost domesticated. Perhaps it is his most domesticated aspect which is here most insisted upon, and it is an aspect to which the least mild of men often lend themselves best. A bull in a china-shop picks his way as daintily as may be. They know, somehow — the barbarians, the men of iron — and even without a mother's training — how to arrange a wrap and place a chair. Ralph placed his mother's with such extreme care that that lady looked up at him with questioning eyes.

"Ralph, dear, if it wasn't for the fact that you have infinitely more money than I, I should say that you were preparing the way for a ten-dollar bill. Is there anything which I can do? You know that what's mine is yours; and if it's my right hand you want, cut off at the wrist, or the house at Hornmouth or the sudden death of any of our friends, why, come to me!"

Ralph laughed. "What a bloodthirsty mother you are!"

She answered him irrelevantly. "You know you're not looking well. You've lost ten pounds."

"Most people would call it an improvement. Lost ten pounds, and you suggest that you lend me ten dollars — it's manifestly unfair. But you're wrong as you can be; I swear that I never felt better, and I've no awful secret — if that's what you mean. I left no wife pining for me on the coast of France, and I haven't spent and wasted my substance in the gambling hells of Europe. In fact, I've managed to make of my trip a very good thing — financially and from the viewpoint of a vacation. Now I've told you all the news — all."

"You've been too good about telling me — and I should never ask your confidence. What right have I to the con-

fidence of a man full-grown in mind and body, a human being with a hundred times my capability and a thousand times my experience?"

"It's not a question of right; and besides, you've all the right in the world. Let me see, I think I've told you about the lovely girl on the steamer and her most amusing mother? They were the sort of pair that made me wish I possessed the reproductive faculty of the artist — immensely typical — coming back to their own country after an absence of years for the very good reason that over there a girl without money stands so little chance."

"So little chance?"

"Yes, of marrying."

"You mean they discussed it with you?"

"I'm afraid they did — or at least Mrs. Dench did. She'd learned the European frankness." Parrish was as frank as she — "She asked my advice as from one man of the world to another. I wish I could have referred her to you — you'd be the very one to tell her."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand what it was she wished to know."

"Why, just what I've said — the best way of launching her daughter."

"You mean socially?"

"Socially and with an eye — an eye to eventually marrying her."

"What a dreadful woman!"

Ralph rose in her defence. "Not dreadful — simply frank. Women are mostly such hypocrites about things of that sort. You, of course, never having had a daughter, can't tell what you'd do."

"I certainly shouldn't discuss her future with strange young men."

They were off on an argument seemingly as abstract as it was far-fetched. All that there had been to say was still unsaid. Mrs. Parrish's eagerness was fed by a fluent dissertation on the hypocrisy of women in matters of the heart, the freedom of choice allowed by American mothers to their daughters, the doubtful wisdom of such a course. Ralph's fluency ran away with him. Mrs. Parrish's support of her countrywomen and of liberty sounded by comparison weak and halting — "I can't agree. A girl, simply because she is unmarried, is not a fool or a slave to be sold in the market-place. She's a free agent with a right to choose for herself. Our system is not perfect, our divorce courts are crowded, but nevertheless —"

"Nevertheless, you wouldn't have it otherwise? Ah — if it wasn't for the side you're on, I should say you were conservative. Let me put it to you like this. If you were getting a horse or an automobile, — the only one you ever expected to be able to afford, — you wouldn't pick it out all yourself, just because you liked its looks. You'd hunt up — if that were possible — the services of an expert who had your best interests at heart. Now, a girl, in getting a husband, has the services of her mother without any hunting at all."

"You consider the mother an expert in husbands?"

"It goes without saying she's more of an expert than the girl. A woman like Mrs. Dench who knows the ropes — why, she's qualified absolutely to decide. Jane is lucky."

"Who's Jane?"

"Mrs. Dench's daughter. She's lucky," Ralph believed

it, "and not in the least a slave to be sold in the market-place. If she were —" He intimated that the market-place would never hold the buyers.

"And all this you got to on the steamer? You made the most of your time."

"You know the things one gets to on a steamer," Ralph brought out.

"March is a little cold for moonlit decks," said his mother. "And besides, which would be your companion on such occasions — the mother, with her knowledge of husbands and ropes, or the lovely girl?"

"Why not both?"

"Oh, I'm not to be caught with chaff of that sort!" The mild eye gleamed. All the Parrish women were mild — the women mild, the men inclined to the reverse.

"You're not to be caught. You're unbelievably clever. Now if you had a daughter —"

"It rests with you, Ralph; but what use would it be? I would never have the chance to show my skill, for she'd be already provided for."

Ralph colored. His mother regarded him in amazement. With a quick, fluttering movement she put out her hand across the table and laid it on his. "It's not the lovely girl?"

"You've always given me credit for the usual amount of common sense." It was uncomplimentary to the lovely girl.

Mrs. Parrish covered her surprise with a little tinkle of laughter. "I've never had cause —" She stopped. "You're of good New England stock — which, by the way, reminds me that with a horse the question of pedigree —"

"But, mother dear, you're almost as frank as Mrs. Dench!"

III

Meeting for the first time in three months, it seemed as though Ralph and his mother had slipped away from their usual familiar footing. They couldn't for the moment regain it. Generally in such cases the returned wanderer has a store of traveller's tales with which to fill the breach; but Ralph's store was too tightly packed to be easily dislodged, and it was at the door of the eternal verities that the one nearest the top should concern the Denches. He would have called it an unaccountable impulse, his choice of them as a topic of conversation, almost as unaccountable as the impulse which had sent him to Europe in the interests of fur dealing three months before. If he had been asked why he had gone, even if he had had the will to answer, he couldn't have done so. The chance came, and its coming had suggested his acceptance of it. But his reasons extended behind that; they were many and vague — and his reasons were usually few and clear. His going had something to do with Emily Stedman — something to do with the Barlows occupying her so much; something to do with an impulse to break a slender but tightening chain, and something to do with a letter which he had received from Mme. Rostov.

It was a merely ordinary bit of kindness from one who was always kind; but it had brought to him vividly the recollection of a happier, fuller period, and the charm the surface of which didn't evade one. Mme. Rostov's charm cried out sharply; its evasions were all intentions and its surfaces mile-posts to those beneath. Her letter had been

full of it — and full, also, of the charm of Paris, its haze and its sunlight and its unmistakable foreignness. As Ralph read it, he could have imagined himself standing in the 'Place de la Concorde' looking up the 'Champs-Élysées' — either there or in the salon of the small hotel that the Rostovs always patronized on their yearly visits to the city of pleasure. At any rate, he hadn't had to imagine himself at either of these places two weeks later. He arrived ostensibly in answer to Mme. Rostov's letter, and his masculine humanity helped him to eat the dish the gods laid before him. He had turned from it to rediscover his old acquaintances, the Denches. And now he was in Boston dining with his mother. He had never before so realized the jerking consequent to a rapid covering of distances.

He wasn't as much of a cosmopolitan as he had thought himself. The true cosmopolitan makes no distinction between one surrounding and another — is equally at home in all; and Ralph Parrish wasn't in the least at home in the dining room of the big Boston hotel. He saw it with the false eye of the outsider, and it was colored by the falseness, from the garishness of the painted ceiling to the brilliancy of the strips of carpet intersecting the polished floor. The waiters outdid each other in an imitation of hurry and the diners in an imitation of gayety. In Paris the gayety was the real thing; it was flesh of its flesh and bone of its bone; but in Boston just that sort of gayety didn't quite succeed. It was as if a gently bred New England lady — preferably the daughter of a distinguished man — should appear before the footlights of the music-hall stage in spangles and tights.

He looked across at his mother. She was the real thing —

as real and as complete in her own way as were the Denches and Mme. Rostov in theirs. He felt that he had always been too close to his mother rightly to appreciate her; and his present lack of a familiar footing made him see her whole — made him see her in all her beautiful perfection. She occupied the place of honor in his gallery of women; and how many men were there, he considered, who could honestly say that of their mothers? Was it perhaps a reflection on his choice of feminine friends? Though as for that, there was Jane Dench to keep the standard up, and there was Emily Stedman. The standard was one of goodness — Jane's goodness was undeniable; Emily's goodness — he ungallantly wondered if it were a mere freak of the Fates. She had certainly committed a sin not generally attributable to good women. She had lowered her cousin's respect for himself. For it was not conducive to this respect — the realization that the woman who had occupied him so much for so many years should suddenly cease to do so. The fault must be hers — therefore the sin. By his impulse to break the slender but tightening chain, he had not meant quite that.

He told his mother with engaging frankness that he had Emily on his conscience just a bit heavily. It had been a question of his going at the moment, or not at all, and he hadn't even had the time to bid her good-by. He had telephoned, but she had been out. He had written, but her answer had gone astray. And here he was back again and, save for the purchase of a trifling gift, he hadn't done a thing about her. His mother knew the way time slipped ahead?

His mother knew.

"How is she?" asked Ralph.

"She's very much better."

"You mean she's stronger? Isn't that splendid! Dr. Jeffries had some new idea up his sleeve before I left, and if he really carried it out, — that was the great thing about her doing so well with her writing, — it gave Dr. Jeffries a bigger chance —"

"But Ralph — you say before you left — before you left she wasn't ill!"

"She certainly wasn't well!"

The table between them became a wall of incomprehension across which they stared blankly.

"You mean that before you left she had already begun to break down? I thought it a sudden collapse."

Ralph confessed to the fact of being completely at sea.

"Didn't you know that Emily nearly died?"

Emily's cousin couldn't fail to understand that. "For the love of the Lord!"

"Not entirely, Ralph."

"Tell me —"

"It was, as I say, a break-down — physical, nervous, everything. Her servant found her lying in a heap on the floor. She was ill for weeks; but now all danger's past — she's up and about, and the same little Emily."

Ralph Parrish had colored with the force of his emotion. "I never was told — I never heard! —"

"I thought of course you knew."

"How *should* I know? You might have written."

"I thought you knew — it seemed somehow more a matter between you and her. We're not much in the habit of discussing Emily."

"You never liked her."

"I liked her very much. On Uncle Richard's death I went straight and asked her to live with me. I've done it again; but she refuses flatly."

"You must bring her round — it's the only solution — I'll go to see her to-morrow. She must think me a cad, never to have given any sign for all these months, and she — poor little woman — I can see her lying there day after day and finally winning out — getting well by her own sheer courage. I can see her —" He repeated it, but the vision was distant and dim.

"She's not living in New York now," said Mrs. Parrish.

"No? Then where —"

"She's moved, bag and baggage, to Ocean City."

Parrish stared. "Come — that's too impossible!"

"Why, it's not impossible at all. It's the very place for her to be — the very place."

"She must leave."

"You'll have to talk with Dr. Jeffries about that. And, besides, why should you care where she is? If it's as you say, that you've made no sign for all these months, — she might have died for all you would have known, — why should you take it upon yourself, as soon as you set foot upon land, to remove her from the place she's selected quite without your advice?"

"Won't you accept my word for it, mother, that Ocean City's not a good selection? You must remember that she's our cousin, yours and mine, and it's our duty to keep an eye —"

"You mean that Ocean City's not respectable?"

"I should hardly —" Parrish hesitated — "Ocean City's perfectly respectable — of course."

"Then what? — Emily's not a child, you know. You're not experimenting with your European ideas about the bringing up of daughters? And even if you were, you'd have no right; Emily's not our daughter — either yours or mine. I've asked her to Hornmouth; what more can I do?"

"You see, mother, it's like this —" Parrish met the still questioning gaze of the lady whom he addressed and drew back. "I can't explain — you wouldn't understand. It's simply that I should like to make up to Emily for my former delinquencies, and if she's at Ocean City, I shan't be able to — there won't be room."

"It will take room?"

"Ocean City's not New York"

As she looked at her son there passed through the mother's mind the same idea that had come to George, the servant at the Town Club. Not that it was an idea with which she was in the habit of explaining Ralph's ambiguities; but she kept a mind open to the free passage of ideas — however new. She glanced with suspicion at the half-emptied bottle of light wine which had accompanied dinner, and decided her suspicion to be groundless. It must have been before that — and it was outside her jurisdiction.

"Ocean City's not New York," Ralph wisely repeated.

"Naturally not. But if you're worried about her isolation, I take it from something she said in her last letter that she's not entirely alone. Those very rich friends of hers — what is their name? — are also stopping at the 'Tidewater.'"

"Is *she* at the 'Tidewater'?"

"Yes. It's considered one of the best hotels there — also one of the quietest. I remember the name of her

friends now — Barlow; they're the bun people. She mentioned only the son; she found him charming — Why, Ralph! What's the matter?"

He had the effect of having completely forgotten his mother's presence. He spoke the name of the Barlows' son, and then more softly, "What an unholy mess!"

CHAPTER XI

IN THE MIDST OF BATTLE

I

THERE came a day filled with the warmth of early April. Ocean City fairly glittered with light and air and people. The booths along the walk were opened, with fresh signs and wonderful wares. The blue of the sea reflected the blue of the sky. The once mythical crowds were mythical no longer; they were arriving in ever increasing numbers; they were like the swelling wake of a jubilant procession.

It reminded the Denches of the Italian Riviera — the daughter painfully, the mother pleasantly. Emily wondered why, if the Riviera were Mrs. Dench's ideal — the standard by which she measured Ocean City — why she had wandered so far afield. Was it, as she said, in order that Jane should not become absolutely expatriated that she had come to the 'Tidewater Hotel'? Emily couldn't tell at all. And Mrs. Dench struck her as a woman upon whose reasons it would be futile to ponder. As she sat there, far back in her wheeled chair, half buried under the contents of a florist's window which she had passingly admired — her large, intelligent face rising up out of the fresh spring blooms, — she reminded Emily of an early pagan idol whose worshippers had been spurred by prospective war or famine or pestilence to an unwonted devotion. It was

David Barlow who had constituted himself the high priest of the sacrifice. She had seen the flowers and liked them, and they were hers. He had come out of the shop, his arms laden, and been rewarded with a smile and a command not to forget Miss Stedman and Jane. It put these ladies in a slightly awkward position, this having to accept of an unspontaneous gift, but they eased the situation by, for the moment, placing their share with Mrs. Dench's. It made a magnificent mass — all the flowers together — and it was their scent mixed with the scent of the sea that called the Riviera so vividly to Mrs. Dench's mind.

"Yes," she said, "the whole thing is wonderfully like — don't you remember, Jane, it was just a year ago; no, a little more than a year, that we were there? The same jolly little party. Only *you* weren't with us then, Miss Stedman."

"I wish I had been."

"Why do you wish that?" asked Jane. "You wouldn't have liked it. Would she, David?"

"The Riviera? I don't know, I'm sure. I thought Miss Stedman liked everything. You told me once," David had turned and was now addressing her — "you told me that everything amused you. You said, I think, that you caressed your pleasures — patted them and fondled them and made the most of them."

It was the sort of thing which, once said, it was useless to disown.

Mrs. Dench laughed. "I can't imagine patting and fondling and caressing the Riviera. It's too tremendous. And besides, some of the people —" she pondered — "it's the people in Ocean City that give the place away, the people

and the clothes. If they all had clothes like yours, Miss Stedman — your clothes have an air, and your hats!" She professed her admiration for Miss Stedman's hats. "Now that one you have on — You understand that the proper function of a hat is to amuse. Dresses, gloves, shoes — they can't be so very amusing; they have certain other functions which come first. But a hat! — Why, that one you have on is the most delicately witty thing I've seen in this country. That combination of colors — those contrasting feathers — Of course, on me a hat like that would be not so much amusing as comic, and on Jane a hat like that would be in bad taste. At her age one goes in for the inconspicuous; and besides, it's not her type. But on you —"

"It is mine?"

"Yours?"

"My type to be amusing — to wear witty hats?"

"Oh, absolutely!"

"Is that the reason," asked Emily, "is it because I'm amusing that you've been so extraordinarily nice to me?"

"We — nice to you — oh, my dear!" Mrs. Dench gazed for a while at Jane and David, who had gone on a little in advance. "You know, even if I hadn't liked you so immensely, Jane, there, would have made your life a burden. She's taken the most tremendous shine to you — says you and she have so much in common — speaks of a sort of bond. Trust Jane for finding a bond between herself and the people she likes!"

It seemed somehow to be not in Jane's favor, her cleverness in this direction, and Emily put in a word in her defence: "Isn't the mere fact that she likes them — and in

consequence they can do nothing but gratefully adore her — isn't that in itself a bond?"

"I don't know — I sometimes wonder. But please don't for a moment think that I'm not delighted at any bond between Jane and you."

Emily laughed. "Yet you didn't allow her to read 'The Cuckoo.'"

Mrs. Dench cut her short. "The author of 'The Cuckoo' is hardly the friend I should have picked out for her; but unfortunately my field for picking is very limited. It's extremely bad for a young girl to be eternally cooped up with an old woman like me, and there you have it!"

"But we're forgetting Mr. Barlow. Isn't he all the friend any girl needs?"

Mrs. Dench's gaze had never left him. "He's a handsome little chap, isn't he? And when it comes to making himself useful — running errands and buying trinkets —"

"Is he a friend you'd have picked out for her if your field for picking had been less limited?"

The inquiry fell on sharpened ears. "He's a man — you're not — the situation's not the same. She likes him, of course, very much indeed. That's just it — she likes him too much. And it's from finding a bond that I'm trying to keep her. It's why I'm so glad about you and her; you'll occupy her. I don't want her to marry so young."

Emily gasped. "You think she'll marry David Barlow?"

"For the future it's my dearest hope; but I'm trying to keep it from reaching that point yet." The diplomat's widow gayly launched into American slang. "Not yet, you know, but soon — but soon!"

In looking back upon this moment it has always been a

source of surprise to Emily that she didn't make some public demonstration — sit down in the middle of the walk, kick her heels in the air, shout, cry, make it plain that she didn't for the moment know where she was. From the point of view of the spectator she was surely getting well paid for her courage in having stayed at the performance. The curtain was up, the drama on. It was true that Mrs. Dench was a woman the like of whom she happened never to have seen. David Barlow was in love with her, and Jane was in love with David Barlow. To complete the circle there should be some one in love with Jane, some one who should in turn be loved by Jane's mother. But no, Jane's mother would not be vulnerable to the tender passion. If she were — why, if she were, Emily hoped that she would be there to see. The abstract enthusiasm of the spectator was taking the place of perching visions. The egotist was learning to efface herself. The drama swung better without her.

There were still times when her own part in it rushed over her. The pitch at which she lived screeched ever upward; the perching visions doubled and trebled and quadrupled. They were all of David Barlow — David bareheaded in the bow of a boat — David hovering over Mrs. Dench's teatable — David reading his morning's paper. She had once been occupied in watching his soul. She had found it easy to comprehend. A good deal of it had been visible to her from where she had sat on Mrs. Dench's gilt-trimmed French sofa. It had been to her a tangible, definite thing — something beyond the perching visions, beyond the beguiling personality. And soul was merely another, larger word for mind. It was the mind that held her and puzzled her — a man wasn't carved in bronze for nothing.

Now Jane — Emily triumphed over Jane — Jane didn't care the snap of a finger for David's mind. She loved him for his 'beaux yeux' — the set of his head upon his shoulders, the deft movement of his hands, the neat, strong poise of his neat, strong body, the sound of his voice and the sound of his laugh. Emily would have paid Jane, and paid her high, for the memory of that day in the Mediterranean with the two coaling yachts, the bright, hard sunlight and David. She wondered if he saw her — if he looked up at her from the little brass-trimmed tender, or if from the first he had eyes only for her mother. Jane's heart must have gone to him straight. It had not been with her a question of growth and months and flowers springing from new-made graves. Emily's passion looked beside hers a very slender thing indeed. Her youth recognized his youth, and with Emily — Emily's youth didn't exist. And surely youth was a necessary concomitant of passion, and love without it as unreal — for all the use it was — as the feast seen through the glass of a cake shop's window. But mightn't mind or soul, or whatever you chose to call it, take the place of youth? Though what was mind, after all, in comparison with perching visions?

Emily's thought was tangled. She took refuge in the simple evidence of her senses. There, ahead of her, walking side by side, were Jane and David, a notably fine pair of young people, possessing between them riches and beauty. What more natural than the thing Emily's companion so grandly intimated? Mrs. Dench would not be the first mother who had sacrificed herself to the happiness of her daughter.

Emily finally gave voice to a sentiment previously brought out by Ralph Parrish. "Jane is lucky."

"You mean you so like David?"

"Immensely — don't you?"

"Why, of course. But then the extent of my liking for David amounts almost to prejudice."

"Every one likes David."

"Yes, every one," said Mrs. Dench. And that seemed the end of that road.

But Emily still had a word. "He's tremendously unselfish."

"You've seen it too? — Of course, Jane and I —" Mrs. Dench paused. "Why, the things we could tell you about David's unselfishness! It never seems to occur to him that he himself has needs. He has ideas about his clothes; but beyond that he might as well be a pauper. Even in the matter of things to eat —"

"With his family," Emily broke in, "it's just the other extreme. Life with them is one great, gorgeous meal. John Barlow has given the public the sort of food they like — they in turn give him the sort he likes. But that's not David."

"Never! And yet I imagine that in this country he's not appreciated. Tell me, — he always refuses to talk with me about his work, — what does he intend to do? Do you know? I've gathered something very vague about political ambitions."

"So have I — something very vague."

"I'm to take it that he's that very rare bird, a member of your American leisure class?"

"So I should think."

Mrs. Dench found it funny. "I've been told it's a class which is largely recruited from laundress's husbands

and the gentlemen who earn their living by voting for President."

"There we have the political ambitions —"

But Mrs. Dench was lost in thought. "It's somehow not like him to rest on his father's laurels."

"No, he's not exactly the type of rich man's son."

"It's a type I know very little about," said Mrs. Dench.

Emily also protested her ignorance.

She had Mrs. Dench's sympathy; and that lady suggested that as the geologist reconstructs the whole of an extinct animal from a single bone, so might they gain a knowledge of all rich men's sons from their knowledge of David.

"But if he's not the type!"

"What matter? Besides, there's rather a dearth at Ocean City of any sons at all. We should be duly grateful for even an uncharacteristic specimen."

"If we all had an equal number of turns," said Emily — Mrs. Dench was not the only woman in Ocean City who could be remarkable — "if we all had an equal number of turns, our gratitude would be boundless. But since you and your daughter arrived — well — I suppose I had my turn before that happened."

She stood, aghast at her own impertinence, but Mrs. Dench answered her far above her deserts. "You had your turn — your opportunity — and you failed to grasp it."

Mrs. Dench was laughing, but Emily put a question in all seriousness. "What would have been your conception of my 'grasping' it?"

The amber eyes, with their tendency towards prominence, stared fixedly. "I would have had no conception. The thing's preposterous. You haven't even had your turn.

But now won't you for a moment emulate David's example, and sacrifice yourself in the cause of others? Won't you make up some excuse to go on in front and join those two? I think Jane's turn has extended long enough."

"I thought it was *Jane*," Emily said, "who objected to seeing so much of David — don't you remember that afternoon when we took tea with you? — so if you object also, why, I can't understand why you see him."

"Oh, Jane doesn't object to seeing him herself! She objects to *my* seeing him. She objects to my seeing him, and I object to her seeing him. It's plain that we either don't trust each other or him."

"Him? "

"Yes, and if we don't trust him, we certainly shouldn't wish each other to be contaminated. Which, as David would say, of course I don't mean." And then Mrs. Dench rather abruptly changed the subject. Her new one was Ralph Parrish. She talked of Ralph Parrish all the way back to the hotel; and Emily — at first puzzled — presently evolved the explanation that she did so because she desired to mitigate any impression she might have conveyed of David's undue importance. If she had been indiscreet, she now gave the effect of wishing her indiscretion to be disregarded. It was astonishing how much trouble she took about it:—

"You tell me it's Mr. Parrish's mother who is really your cousin? It must be delightful to have relations. Mine are so very scattered — why, I haven't sat down to a family Christmas dinner for twenty years! The Parrishes are Bostonians, are they not? Mr. Parrish told me that for himself he infinitely preferred New York; but men are apt to.

I know very little about either city. Washington is more in my line. Speaking of Washington, I believe your cousin is not, like David, interested in politics."

"No, neither church nor state nor army —"

Mrs. Dench looked up. "I imagine him hardly suited to the church, and of course the army is unoriginal."

"But so is the thing he's in unoriginal — the great field of commerce, the tanning of pelts."

"Is he clever at it — this tanning of pelts?"

"He doesn't actually do it himself, you know."

"Oh, I know." Mrs. Dench waited . . .

"Yes," Emily finally went on, "I believe he's very clever at it. He has the knack of getting on with people — making himself right with all sorts of men."

Mrs. Dench confessed that if she hadn't their word for it, — both his word and Emily's, — she never would have guessed his occupation. "He suggests leisure, great golden leisure — his energies seem all dormant and his strength unexerted. He's like a magnificent animal basking in the sun."

"Oh, that's his pose. He's learned that a pose —"

Mrs. Dench interrupted. "He's learned a great deal."

"But he doesn't expect his poses to be believed!"

"Then when they are, he gets more than he bargained for. Why don't you have him down here?"

Emily answered obliquely. "Wouldn't he be dreadfully on our hands? He'd find it dull, and through sheer pride we'd be forced to entertain him. Now if Jane weren't already so occupied —"

"Oh — Jane!" From her manner of pronouncing it, Emily caught the impression that Mrs. Dench wasn't

entirely satisfied with her daughter's name. "Jane —" she repeated it. "Jane's not so occupied as you think."

"Perhaps it would be just the very diversion needed to bring it to a point."

"It?"

"Your plan for her and Mr. Barlow."

"Oh, to be sure. But really, all joking aside, why don't you have him down?"

"Why don't you?"

"You know, I think I will."

It struck Emily as a coincidence, the handwriting of Ralph Parrish's mother on the envelope of a letter which she found in her mail-box half an hour later. The coincidence was too striking — the letter was opened with an uncanny sense of possible disaster, and it was in a voice that barely concealed her relief that she, turning, spoke to Jane.

Jane was also getting her mail, and she raised her eyes from an examination of it. "Pardon me, what did you say?"

"I said that my cousin, Mrs. Parrish, is coming here. She's to stay one week, and she arrives to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm so glad!"

Emily stared. "Now, why?"

"Why? Because mother does so long for the society of an older woman. It's frightfully bad for her, being eternally cooped up with a mere chit of a girl like me."

History repeated itself almost word for word: "We're forgetting Mr. Barlow."

"Oh, she has David, if that's what you mean."

"Doesn't she like David?"

"Almost too much. But that doesn't prevent her longing

for some one of her own age and sex — some one with whom she can — metaphorically speaking — sit on the front porch and embroider doilies.”

Emily again stared; but Jane was looking at her very straight and very gravely. “She positively longs —” And didn’t this longing exactly coincide with the idea of Mrs. Dench’s character to be gained from the hopes and fears that she had so recklessly confided that very morning? If it hadn’t been for this — for the wonderful way in which Mrs. Dench had explained herself — Emily would have thought her daughter’s gaze almost too straight and too grave.

II

“Well, Cousin Laura!”

“Emily —”

The two women had spied each other out on the crowded station platform, and were now upon each other with little pats of greeting.

“I’m so glad — so glad —”

“Are you really?”

“Yes, I am; and I appreciate it — your coming all this way just for me.”

“You got me a room?”

“A good one, with an ocean view, just around the corner from mine.”

“I was afraid you might have difficulty so near the crowded season. I suppose it’s filling fast. Now, my trunk — I have my check —”

Emily summoned one of the ‘Tidewater’ porters. “Here,” she explained, “all that is done for you — you

forget we're a city of invalids. We're done for, done for, done for, from morning till night."

"Yes, of course."

The 'Tidewater' motor-bus hissingly awaited their pleasure. They had it to themselves on the way back, as most of the guests of that hotel arrived by a special morning train. Mrs. Parrish would have done so, too; but she had taken advantage of her passage through New York to accomplish some necessary shopping, and as it was, the hours at her disposal fled all too quickly.

Emily asked for news of Hornmouth. There was none — it hadn't stirred an inch or changed a hair. "Dr. Rainor — Dr. Guthrie — still?"

"Yes — still. No one has died of any note."

"It's really all one expects of Hornmouth, isn't it? But tell me — you left there yesterday — you've been practically on the wing ever since. And I know what it is, even the little trip from town. Why, you must be exhausted!"

"Not at all. When I start out to do a thing —" Mrs. Parrish intimated the rest.

Emily was on the point of asking her what it was that she had started out to do. The mild eye blazoned forth a motive more important than a mere cousinly visit. But it was just because of this that Emily saw the futility of a question. She saw it still more clearly after the bus had deposited them at the big columned façade of their hotel and Mrs. Parrish had put down her name in the register. There was a motive, surely, behind the mild, scrutinizing stare with which she took in every nook and corner of her new surroundings; and a motive in the question she put to Emily immediately upon ascending to the privacy of their rooms: —

"What sort of a hotel is the 'Tidewater'?"

"Why, don't you see?" Emily included everything in her gesture.

"I see it's big and clean and expensive. But that's not what I meant." She laid aside her coat and gloves. "No, that's not what I meant."

Emily waited.

The wait was rewarded. "Is it respectable?"

"Why, the management probably makes the usual effort to keep it so."

"And can they always tell?"

"Well, when they can't tell —"

"It doesn't matter, does it? Is it the biggest hotel here?"

"No, there's one bigger — the 'Balliol Castle.' It's showier and a little more expensive — and a far fitter subject for your doubts."

Mrs. Parrish was standing in front of the mirror taking off her hat. What it lacked in trimming was made up in hat-pins, and they bristled militantly when she finally set it down. There was something militant, also, in the attitude of its owner — something suggesting the soldier who pitches his tent in the enemy's country. She suddenly turned upon Emily. "If the 'Balliol Castle' is the sort of place you say, why — in heaven's name — don't people like the Denches go there?"

"The Denches? — I didn't know you knew them."

"I don't know them — I've heard of them from Ralph."

"Ralph must have sadly maligned them if what you intimate about them you heard from him."

"Indeed, he didn't. He didn't say a word against them."

It's just from what he didn't say that I drew my conclusions. Men are such innocent lambs where women are concerned."

Emily laughed. "I should hardly call Ralph an innocent lamb!"

"Well, on that your opinion's worth more than mine. Tell me, do you know the Denches well? Do you see a great deal of them?"

Emily was puzzled. "Why do they interest you so greatly? Though they're perfectly respectable, they're not at all your sort. What is it about them?"

"If they're not my sort, it would seem that they were hardly yours, my dear. But you haven't told me whether you saw them a great deal. Do you?"

"Why, no — only through David Barlow."

"You mean the son of Barley Buns?"

"Yes, the son of Barley Buns."

"And do you see a great deal of him?"

"No, not a great deal. You know how it is in a place like this with nothing to do *but* see people."

"How does it happen that Mr. Barlow's here — is he ill?"

"No, not in the least."

"I see. It's simply a case of too much money. But why is he here — is it on your account?"

"Can you imagine it?"

"Hardly, but in these days you never can tell. Does he see a great deal of the Denches?"

"Yes, he's with them all the time. I have every reason to suppose that he's going to marry Jane Dench."

Mrs. Parrish's voice was suddenly pitched sharp. "And I have every reason to suppose that he's going to do nothing of the sort!"

"I have it from her mother, but if you know more surely — if your authority's better than that —"

"You have it from her mother?"

"Straight — yesterday morning."

"When is the wedding to take place?" Mrs. Parrish was nothing, if not direct.

Emily hedged. "It isn't quite as definite as I seem to have led you to think. It's simply that I have it from her mother that he wants to marry her, and she's very much in love with him, and Mrs. Dench is holding them back for the present. She doesn't want Jane to marry too young."

"Why, I understood that marrying Jane was Mrs. Dench's whole reason for coming to this country!"

"Well, there's a mistake somewhere."

"Yes," said Mrs. Parrish, "there's a mistake somewhere. You must think it queer, my asking all these questions about people whom I don't even know; but I came here under the very wrong impression that it was Ralph Jane was going to marry, and I had a certain maternal curiosity. He got back from Europe changed and queer and silent, and when he did open his mouth it was to talk of these people; though I could see they were really the one subject he was trying to avoid. It wouldn't have done, you know — you can see that. Though how I could have prevented it . . . Those sort of people would be open to the financial argument, and I could have engaged to cut Ralph off without a cent. The boy makes such a comfortable sum — I don't know —" The boy's mother sighed with relief. "But as long as what you say is true, and you have it from her mother, it's a problem that we shan't have to consider. Come, let's go downstairs. Can't we have tea? I should like to see what it is I've escaped."

III

It was the hour which they seemed to make so much of at Ocean City, the hour before dinner. Mrs. Parrish was enjoying it to the full; she had already rested from her travels, and was now — as she said — highly refreshed and prepared for anything. In her whole-hearted desire for adventure, she rivalled her cousin Emily. The adventure which should by rights have been hers had been unexpectedly removed. Her son was safe; the name of Parrish didn't need defence; and there stretched before her an entire week in which her only occupation would be to live down the past afternoon. She had the disturbing sense of having made a fool of herself before her cousin. It was only an impression — an intuition — that she had had about Jane Dench; and to come to Ocean City on the strength of an impression — to blurt out all her fears into the ears of Emily Stedman — it left no doubt about her having made a fool of herself. The fact was clearly reflected in the sarcastic little face which Emily turned to her; and an adventure — any adventure — would have lightened the atmosphere. She couldn't get away from that white little face, so like her own in general racial aspect and so unlike in the more individual marks. It was as though her own were twisted to a comic mask — as though it were riddled with sharp accents. Emily was cleverer than she; the face showed it, and she exploited her cleverness. Mrs. Parrish never had thought this last to be quite in good taste.

The two women sat there in the very centre of the big sun parlor, frankly waiting for something to occur. They had had tea, and they had changed their dresses for dinner, and

they had told each other, for the tenth time, how glad they were to be together. Emily had recounted the details of her illness, and Mrs. Parrish had praised her present look of health. The climate of Ocean City received favorable comment. Mrs. Parrish felt its benefits already — "I'm prepared," she said, "for anything —"

And into this expectancy came the rather inadequate figure of David Barlow. He had stepped for a moment within their range of vision and responded with such alacrity to Emily's greeting that she felt justified in asking him to sit down. Mrs. Parrish liked him immediately.

"I've heard of you from my cousin and from my son, and I once had the pleasure of meeting your father. It was at a charity directors' dinner in Boston."

"Oh, yes, he's very much interested in that work."

"Indeed, you don't have to tell me! I'm on the Board, and I know what he's done."

"He's done a great deal, I believe."

"It's really wonderful. And his knowledge of the conditions — I had a most interesting talk with him, and I couldn't help wishing that we had him in Boston; but, of course, New York can't spare him."

David always lent a willing ear to praise of his father. "It's a marvel to me," he said, "how he finds the time to do half the things he does. He has his business interests and his charities and a finger in the political pie, and he rarely lets a year go by without Europe. He gives one such a high ideal of energy that for one's self one might as well abandon trying to reach it."

"That's a sentiment unworthy of his son," Mrs. Parrish smiled.

"There, you see! It's hopeless to be worthy."

Emily asked the immediate cause of his pessimism.

"I'm abandoned," he told her; "till you held out a welcoming hand I was wandering about in a way that was enough to make any one pessimistic."

"You poor young man!"

"Thank you for your sympathy. I need it, I assure you. I went for a stroll after lunch and returned to a desert. There was no one to give me tea—oh, no thank you, you've probably had yours and it's too late—no one to amuse me at all. I felt a certain hesitancy about foisting myself upon you; I knew you had Mrs. Parrish."

"Where are your little friends?"

"I caught the briefest glimpse of them all excitement over a telegram. They haven't had a second to spare me."

"His little friends?—" Mrs. Parrish begged enlightenment.

Her begging was lost in the rapid flow of David's narrative. "I asked them what had happened, and they didn't even bother to answer me. I know when I'm not wanted; I came away."

"You had a hard time."

"Why, I even implored Jane to come and play with me; but Jane couldn't—her mother answered for her—Jane was taking a nap. I jeered at the excuse for its falseness, but Mrs. Dench was unmoved—"

"Oh, the Denches!" said Mrs. Parrish.

"Don't you know? We were speaking of them only a few moments ago—Mrs. Dench and her daughter—"

Mrs. Parrish knew.

"They're the only people you can speak of down here,

aren't they?" David put it to Emily, "I never saw such a dull collection. There's you and the Denches and, perhaps, me, and absolutely no one else! I'm afraid, Mrs. Parrish, that you'll find it dull."

The mild eye regarded him. "I didn't come to Ocean City for gayety. And if you don't find it dull — but, of course, with you the situation's different —" She smiled at him in a manner which made him turn a puzzled face to Emily, and Emily promptly took it upon herself to explain: —

"My cousin persists in the foolish illusion that she's tottering on the brink of the grave. She fences herself in with an idea of age, and she looks upon the situation of every one her junior as 'different' from her own."

The manner and meaning of Mrs. Parrish's smile had been befogged. "I believe," she said, "that in these modern days there is no such thing as age. We're all the same — the child of ten and the woman of fifty — our situations — our knowledge — our way of life."

"You and Mrs. Dench should get together. She sympathizes with you absolutely."

"Mrs. Dench! —" Emily stared. "Mrs. Dench goes to the other extreme. She's the very exemplification of all that Mrs. Parrish objects to!"

That lady protested amid the general laughter, and Miss Stedman admitted putting it too strongly. Mrs. Parrish held secretly the opinion that this would be impossible, but her protestations continued loud: "I have one thing to thank her for even before I've the pleasure of her acquaintance, and that is the pleasure of Mr. Barlow's. If she hadn't so insisted on her daughter's nap —"

David appreciated her putting it like that. "You soothe my shattered pride. Mrs. Dench would have none of me — she was absorbed in her telegram."

Emily suggested that the telegram might have been important.

"More important than I?" David asked. "Oh, if it were, she would have told me."

Emily again explained. "If it were anything requiring immediate action, Mr. Barlow's aid would be invaluable."

"True devotion!" said Mrs. Parrish, smiling.

The big doors at the farther end of the sun parlor were thrown wide. They led into the dining room, and their opening was an announcement of dinner. Several people — those who in David's judgment were not to be spoken of — rose to take advantage of their opportunities. They had been waiting for this very moment — the hands of a great clock, pointing to seven, upheld them. But Emily didn't dine till the half-hour. Neither did the Denches; and as David made their hour his, the opening of the doors didn't directly affect Mrs. Parrish, who continued to await her adventure. She looked inquiringly at her cousin. Couldn't they have dinner? But her cousin was talking to David. The conversation since the opening of the doors had taken on a more spasmodic character. The chief weight of it fell upon Emily, and she proved herself equal to her burden: —

"Doesn't it seem to you that we have a quite disproportionate number of meals? There's nothing to do here but eat — we live from feeding time to feeding time. We're fast becoming the most arrant sensualists."

"Oh hardly!"

"Well, I admit it's rather the blind and passive sensualism of invalids and children. We're petted animals in a gilded cage —"

"Speaking of pessimism!" said David. His eyes kept turning towards the other doors — those through which one would have to come in order to enter the room from the hall and so pass by to the dining room doors at the farther end.

Emily valiantly held him. "It's not pessimism. It's merely the artist in me seeking to clothe the external aspect with drollery. At heart we're not petted animals — at heart we're not sensualists. Our hearts are untouched — our —"

It was Mrs. Parrish who cut her short. "Oh, Emily, look! Look at the lovely girl! —"

"It's Jane Dench," said David, "and her mother."

There was a third figure that David didn't for the moment connect with them, the figure of a man, big and blond and oddly familiar; it was only the dimness of shaded lights that made him not instantly recognizable. Mrs. Dench was sure that he should be, however. She came straight towards Emily — straight towards Mrs. Parrish — she led him, and Ralph Parrish followed, a magnificent trophy of her spear.

Mrs. Parrish had risen; but she made no pretence of meeting her son halfway. As she watched his approach, she stood still with a stillness which was barely disturbed by his surprised halt, his broken exclamation —

"Mother!"

She kissed him tenderly, though her first words were to

Emily and cabalistic to the rest. "You see my authority is better than that."

"Not necessarily —" Most of Emily's strained eagerness was for the look of triumphant happiness in the eyes of Mrs. Dench.

Jane turned to Parrish, softly apologetic. "I knew your mother was here and it quite went out of my head to tell you the good news. But you know it now, and it's all the more delightful."

And then some one effected an introduction between the three women.

CHAPTER XII

CONCERNING THE FLAVOR OF WINES

I

A WRITER — a writer with a book like "The Cuckoo" to her credit, appealing as it does both to the critic and the cash-girl — gets abominably keen on the nuances of the human relation, the small differences between Tweedledum and Tweedledee. A writer of that sort has to — it's her stock in trade, her box of tricks. Even the relations which most intimately concern her, she views from a distance sufficient to see them whole. She doesn't let a good thing slip through her hands merely for want of proper watching. Sometimes, of course, a thing crops up which would seem to the lay mind almost too good, too intimate, an observation too inverted, — but the habit of analysis still clings. It's a form of self-consciousness; but civilization itself is a form of self-consciousness. Highly civilized beings who are not of the ink-ridden brotherhood learn to extract the full flavor from the wine which they roll upon their tongues.

Emily's wine, perhaps because she came to it with an accumulated thirst, had never before had a flavor so ambrosial. It touched and held the aromatic mean between cloying and bitterness, the acrid balancing the sweet to which she had once been an uncomplaining victim. Her

cellar, — and the houses of most pale literary ladies are constructed without one, — her cellar was widely stocked. It could claim kinship with the best. She might have up bottle after bottle — a mouthful here — a glass there — and there would be no sensible diminution in the dusty rows below.

She had never before been so in the midst. The human relation had never before been so stripped for her inspection. And it wasn't the view outside her window that she was watching, or the activities of the people next door. Other people — nonsense. It was excruciatingly, terribly herself; herself in her relation to Ralph Parrish, herself in her relation to David Barlow, to Mrs. Dench, to Jane, to her cousin Laura. And once in relation to them altogether — herself. Yet she felt herself above them as the extended toe of a music-hall dancer is above her audience, or the chirp of a grasshopper above thunder. The battle raged about her; she likened herself to the angel of victory hovering overhead, but her observations — downward and inward — showed her wings dulled with dust.

The dust was the finest flavor of the wine. She was in the midst appallingly.

Ralph Parrish had come back; and with him her old passion, refreshed. The newly made grave was robbed of its treasure. The pendulum had swung again. That part of herself concerned with her possession of her cousin was capering about, indecently unaware of its shroud. Parrish had come back, a new Parrish, matured and thinned and confident, none the less splendid for a certain condensation of modelling. His eyes were more than ever of slate; and the closer clipping of his mustache didn't quite hide the

wide mouth, hardened in its wideness and always curled a little upward from the white, straight teeth beneath. But the surface was still smooth and sleek; the magnificent physical presence was still there, the spread of shoulder and length of limb. Emily felt that she had never before really seen him. He had always been too near, the magnificent physical presence too taken for granted. He had gone away; and it had been without sight of him that her passion had come and lived briefly without light, like a thing killed by birth. And now it was born again.

It always seemed to choose for this feat moments of stress — moments which would be in themselves sufficiently full. But the fulness intrinsic to this last one might have been forever lost save for Emily's fixed habit of analysis. Her faculties were jerked to a multiplied activity; her vision and her hearing, and, as Parrish had turned to her from his mother's embrace and taken both her hands in his, her sense of that — she didn't miss any of it. She saw clearly the triumphant happiness in the eyes of Mrs. Dench, Jane's unwonted softness, her cousin Laura's tense excitement. Then the splendor of the physical presence had been too strong; she was blinded to everything but that; she had stood there with her hands in Parrish's and the whole current of her strength was centred in those hands. Thoughts came tumblingly, — queer, inconsequent images. She remembered quite vividly the University library at Hornmouth and the faces of her father and mother. Tunes ran in her head — not in any way suggested by the one which the hotel orchestra was playing. Verses, headless and tailless, repeated themselves with syncopated insistence: —

“Soon to glory shall he rise . . .”

"... And her loud steeds fret not,
Nor lift not a lock of their great white manes..."

"The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold..."

The last was a memory from a childhood's admiration of Byron. It had extraordinarily little to do with the present circumstance.

"And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold..."

She had looked up into Ralph Parrish's smiling face. She was suddenly aware, through a sentence yet unfinished, a gesture still in progress, that all this had taken but a bare instant of time. It was as if time had stopped, especially for her. She had looked from Parrish to David Barlow, and the David Barlow she had loved went to nothing under her eyes. He was a being of visions — of unreality — a puppet made only in the workshop of her own mind. In his place was a young man, small and rather pale, with a well-cut profile and a slightly nervous manner.

II

"I was terribly sorry to hear you'd been ill, Emily. But you are better now, aren't you? You're looking splendid. Isn't Emily splendid, mother?" Parrish smilingly demanded corroboration.

"She's certainly better than I've ever seen her."

"Oh, my dear, I'm better than any one's ever seen me!"

Mrs. Dench looked at her. "It's a triumph for Ocean City, isn't it?"

"It's a triumph," said Parrish, "for Emily's own little pluck. She simply determined she'd get well, and she did.

I think —" he turned to her — "I think it was bully of you!" He was like that from the first moment of his visit — singling her out — making it clear how glad he was to see her.

They were all dining together at Mrs. Dench's table — the widow had seen it was the only thing — and they formed, even in the vast spaces of the 'Tidewater,' a fairly conspicuous group. There was Jane, always lovely, and Mrs. Dench who had Presence, and Emily in a gown which Ralph Parrish had not been the first to praise. Ralph's mother lent an air of distinction, and the two men were a sufficient contrast to be something more than furniture. It was a festivity — a celebration — and they all did their best towards its success. Conversation didn't stay at anything so sombre as illness. What was illness, after all, but an absence of health? And health meant beauty, and beauty — But beauty could be imitated.

Ralph denied it. "There's a stuff made in Paris that comes in a bottle, and you put it on with a sprayer or a blowpipe or something of that sort. You come out the most wonderful pink; but that's not beauty!"

"Hardly. But doesn't it in time wash off?"

"I believe not. It's supposed to go with you to the grave; though you wouldn't have a grave, would you, till long after you'd ceased to use it? The alternative's too horrible."

"Death might strike one unawares," said Mrs. Dench.

"Well, it's surely better," Emily thought, "to meet death pinkly —"

Echoes of their mirth reached the very end of the dining room.

"Isn't Emily a wonder, mother?"

Mrs. Parrish gave her assent.

Emily, thus lauded, went on. It reminded her of the brief day of her celebrity. "You see," she said, "if one can't have beauty, one can at least have the other thing in an interesting manner — not as if one's lack of bloom were merely the result of stupid ailments. And that's where the contents of the bottle comes in!"

"You speak as from an intimate knowledge —"

"Not half as intimate as the one you speak from."

"How should you? I've but lately come from Paris."

Mrs. Dench shook her head. "Poor old Paris never escapes. She is almost as much an object of public jest as the mother-in-law."

"It seems unnecessary, doesn't it? But I think Ralph merely meant that as he'd been to Paris, and as it's in Paris that this famous cosmetic is made —" Ralph's mother shielded him from even the suspicion of vulgarity.

Again there was laughter.

Emily took it upon herself to ask the question which had been on the tip of Mrs. Parrish's tongue ever since her son's arrival, "How long do you expect to be here?"

"Probably till Monday." It was then Friday.

Emily counted up the days — "Two whole ones and a little over."

He was at some pains to explain how he had arranged it. He and another man had been going down to the other man's place somewhere in Delaware, just for a whiff of the real spring, and then this other man suddenly couldn't go. Parrish was stranded with all his plans made. He remembered Ocean City. He had been promising himself

the pleasure of looking in on them there — and now the promise was fulfilled. Here he was. He flung himself on their mercy and hoped they'd entertain him. He was sure he was upsetting things dreadfully ; but he was so past redemption — so hardened — that he simply didn't care. He'd telegraphed to Mrs. Dench, to be sure they wouldn't be too thunderstruck, and — as he had said before — here he was. His manner seemed jokingly to inquire what they intended to do about it.

Mrs. Parrish watched him during the progress of this discourse with that little air she often had, of tremendous interest combined with a certain mental reservation. In times past she had frequently listened to her husband in much the same way. The interest paid. She got something out of it, even if not quite what it was intended she should get. That was clear from the very apprehending glance which she threw across the table to Emily and held there in vain for an answering luminosity. None came. Emily's eyes were occupied with Parrish's. It was curiously from Jane that she had her response, and Jane was the enemy.

Jane had been living up to her reputation for quietness, devoting herself almost exclusively to the business of dinner and not caring whether or no she appeared a bit dull. Perhaps she knew how hard it would be for any one as beautiful as she ever to appear dull. Her dulness translated itself into a sort of soft acquiescence, a tender, brooding maidenliness. She listened to Ralph Parrish's description of his predicament, his reasons for having thrust himself upon them so suddenly, and offered no comment. Then she looked up slowly — a movement of eyes rather than of

head — and caught his mother's apprehending glance full. The glance wavered and dropped, as though traitorous, and met hers again. Understanding answered understanding, and smile answered smile. Speech would have spoiled it. The understanding which sprang up between the two women — the older and the younger — was of Ralph Parrish, and needed nothing to complete it. Jane went on with the business of dinner, summoning a passing waiter to minister to a want still unsupplied.

"We don't care why you're here, you know, as long as you're here. We're so glad to have you for any reason at all that it's not a bit necessary for you to apologize." David Barlow had been positively longing, as Jane would have said, for a brother at arms. Hard, brittle object as he is represented as being, he had been enveloped by women as by so much wrapping. He was beginning to feel himself hardly a man in a world of men. He welcomed Parrish with a very real cordiality. "No," he repeated, "it's not a bit necessary for you to apologize."

"Then I won't," said Parrish; "I'll devote all my energies to making the most of my time."

Emily's laugh broke high. "This way, ladies — this way — don't crowd! —"

"Isn't it lucky we have David as a sort of consolation prize?" It was Jane's only contribution to the gayety of her fellow-diners.

They all laughed, but Mrs. Parrish was unexpectedly appreciative. "My dear Miss Dench — *what* a theory!" The first lady of Hornmouth nearly swallowed her handkerchief in her effort to quell a too great indignity of mirth; but whether it was amusement at the implied comparison

between David and her son or merely appreciation of the wit of Jane, even Emily, whose perceptions of the scene were very much alive, couldn't quite make out.

She came to a decision, however, when, at a late hour, after the long evening had spent itself and Ocean City was — collectively speaking — asleep, she heard a timid knock at her door and opened it to admit her cousin. Mrs. Parrish was prepared for bed with a certain New England precision. The sprig-patterned wrapper, the tight gray braids hanging over each shoulder, the starched ruffle of her nightgown, all contributed to an effect of extreme personal nicety. Here was a woman who didn't throw herself upon her couch with the emotions of the day still warring. She set her house in order at frequent intervals, physically and mentally. It was in the furtherance of this last that she had come. She was not given to midnight conferences, and she didn't indulge in them unless she had something important to say — something which wouldn't wait till morning.

"I've changed my mind!"

Emily didn't understand. "Changed your mind — about what?"

"My dear, I thought I'd tell you — that Miss Dench — Jane — I've never liked any one so much."

"You rather wish now that it were true — that Ralph were going to marry her?"

"I've never seen any one so suited to him."

Emily set down upon her toilet-table the steel instrument with which she had been filing her nails. "But her mother — what do you think of her mother?"

"I shall simply have to accept her. She's undoubtedly

dreadful, but she's not glaringly, conspicuously dreadful — a stranger wouldn't know —"

"Why do *you* think she's dreadful?"

"Don't ask me — I couldn't tell you why. But it's not her mother that Ralph is going to marry!"

"Aren't you taking a good deal for granted?"

"You mean —"

"I mean that you've no guarantee that he either is or isn't going to marry either of them."

"Is he attentive to the mother?" If he were, the adventure would at last seem to have arrived.

"Is he?" said Emily; "why, if you asked me, I should say yes."

"The engagement must be broken."

"Oh, there's no engagement!"

"Of course not. I mean the engagement, if there is any, between Miss Dench and Mr. Barlow."

"You want the coast quite clear for Ralph? But suppose he doesn't intend to land there? I said, you know, that I thought him attentive to the mother."

"The mother — nonsense!" Mrs. Parrish voiced her scorn. She explained at some length that Ralph was not that sort of man. She became still more lucid, "I don't say that he wouldn't be capable of going any length you like, but he'd marry the daughter."

The comic mask of Emily's face was folded and crumpled in laughter. "My dear Cousin Laura, where's your morality?"

"When I see a girl like Jane Dench, my morality upholds me in leaving no stone unturned to secure her for my son."

"If he will, he will, you know; and if he won't, he won't."

"You think I shall do no good? You don't understand him in the least!"

"Aren't you glad that I don't?"

"Oh, you'd be quite impossible for Ralph." Mrs. Parrish's attention was momentarily diverted — "Tell me, why do you powder your nose at this hour?"

"It's a special kind of powder that's supposed to be very beneficial to the skin." Emily buried her whole face in its midst and emerged white, but triumphant. "Very beneficial. You said I would be impossible for Ralph — for whom would I not be?"

"Why not for Mr. Barlow?" Mrs. Parrish was nothing if not direct; but it was clear that Emily thought her plan the best joke she'd heard in years. The wine was of a flavor delicate and varied; and Emily, in spite of the fullness and fatigue of her day — perhaps because of it — was well able to appreciate it.

She let her cousin wait for a reply. It finally came. "Never — never in the world!"

III

Parrish arranged his mother and Emily at the far end of the long piazza — the end that turned and gave a view of the gorgeous, windy sunset — he tucked them in, he bundled them up; he was as devoted, as deferential, as if they hadn't been merely his two nearest living female relatives. He stood there facing them, his back against a great white column, one hand on the piazza railing, in the other his interminable cigarette. He was perfectly easy, perfectly given up to the enjoyment of the moment. His ease and his enjoyment were like a great hand laid soothingly upon

the troubled unrest of his companions. For Mrs. Parrish's natural gladness at her son's presence was tempered by the disquieting sense that he should have been with Jane — that he was wasting precious time; and Emily's gladness was not so much tempered as fused and parched by the desire to have him to herself. The precious time was going, second by second and minute by minute. It seemed to her as though she had waited for this all her life — this seeing love face to face. The years when she had known Parrish at Hornmouth, the period of the late thirties, the new-made grave, the vision of David Barlow, all these were but the developing experiences which now enabled her really to see.

She was quite shameless. She was absolutely aware that when Parrish wasn't with her, arranging her wraps and her chair, telling her in a thousand ways how much he liked her, he was performing similar offices for Mrs. Dench. And that was where her shamelessness came in, for she didn't care. In fact — still more shameless — as she looked on at Mrs. Dench and her cousin, the thrill of the spectator was not unknown to her. She was the first, or rather the only one, fully to take the situation in. A novelist becomes of necessity sharp in matters of that sort, and her intimate knowledge of Parrish made it all the simpler — she knew so well what with him certain looks and expressions meant. Though there was extraordinarily little upon which one could lay a finger. It seemed to be an achievement of the intangible by two people who neither of them suggested it. They were essentially of the same race; without a physical resemblance they had yet come out of the same mould; and it would have been more than stupid of them not to

have finally found each other out. And to the spectator, artistically inclined, their finding left little to be desired. They understood each other's language without a fault; and their difference of years was a mere moment in the æons that had passed since they had been young together upon Olympus. Which circles about again to the question of time, and Emily's appreciation of its fleeting nature.

If she had waited all her life for this unblinded faculty of sight, she had also waited for the opportunity to use it. It was upon her now — her opportunity — her turn — and the chances were strong that it might not be again; for Ralph Parrish was no longer hers, even in the sense that he had been during the period of the late thirties. But his past — his future — even that part of his present which didn't concern her — troubled her but little. There was a part of his present which did concern her; that time, rapidly running out, when he was with her, devoted, deferential and admiring, and she basked in the light of the magnificent physical presence. That was her opportunity. Her conception of grasping it wasn't too beyond the bounds of the possible; it wasn't much that she asked — the tangible — that part of his present which did concern her to be made wholly hers. If she was in the midst, it only showed her what the midst might really be. Her vision of it was vivid — but she'd done with visions; she wanted memories. This, her opportunity, might pass and leave behind only the memory of a vision — splendid, if you like —

She stirred in her wrappings, and leaned forward to rearrange the hanging fringed border of the steamer rug which Parrish had tucked about her knees.

"You're not comfortable!" It seemed, the way he said it, a horrible condition.

"Yes, I am; but I'm not very warm."

Mrs. Parrish's sense of responsibility was roused. "You're not warm? — Why, that won't do — get up and walk about."

"I think I will."

Parrish stooped to pick up the rug which Emily in rising let fall. "I'll come with you. Mother, won't you? We'll just have a turn about the piazza."

"No thank you, Ralph, I'll stay here. Why don't you look up the Denches and ask them to have tea with us?"

"I hardly like to bother them. They're with Barlow."

"A man who lets himself be beaten by little Mr. Barlow!"

"I don't know what you mean —" Parrish might have said more, but Emily was waiting for him.

She took his arm. "These early spring days are treacherous. A chill descends —" But Parrish cut her short: —

"Tell me — what does mother mean?"

"What she says, I suppose, or rather what she intimates."

"And what does she intimate?"

"That she hasn't any use for a man who lets himself be beaten by David."

"Well, I must say she goes wading in queer puddles!"

They walked in silence to the opposite bend of the piazza. At the bend they swung about, and it was on this homeward stretch that they again found words. "Do you know, there's a question I should very much like to ask you?"

"Well," said Emily, "ask it."

"I don't know whether I've the right to."

"You won't know, will you, till you've asked it?"

"It's this. Why is mother here?"

"To stay with me."

"Is that really the reason? I'm afraid you'll think me prying, but it's a matter that rather concerns me, as I had the impression that she was here on some business of mine."

"What business of yours could she be on?"

"That's what I don't know. It goes without saying I'd be perfectly charmed to explain anything to her. My life, as you know, is an open book. He who runs may read — who was it said, he who reads may run?"

"I don't know. Were they thinking of you?"

Emily felt a tighter pressure on her arm. "Oh, I'm frightful!" Parrish seemed to exult in his frightfulness, for his gayest laugh rang out. "Yes, I'm frightful, but we won't talk of that. These early spring days are, as you say, treacherous — a chill descends. You're warmer now? Tell me if I set too much of a pace."

"Indeed, no."

"You're the same bully little girl. I shouldn't call the great Miss Stedman a little girl, should I? But you are little; and as for your age, I think my standard's grown horribly high, because I think any one under — well, we won't say what — any one under that a mere chicken."

They reached the far end again and exchanged greetings with Mrs. Parrish. "You're quite all right?"

"Quite all right!"

Parrish was giving himself up to the enjoyment of this moment also. In fact, it was to his talent for giving himself up that he owed his success in the art of wholesale fur

dealing. When he worked he worked, and when he played he played — the line between was clearly defined.

"Why didn't you answer my letter?"

Emily replied to him in the same gay vein. "Why didn't you send me another?"

"I was so mortally hurt by your neglect. Even if you were ill and couldn't write yourself, you could have at least sent me word. It's not the way to treat an old friend and cousin."

"But it surely wasn't the way to treat one — to go off without saying good-by."

"My dear Emmy — you know I tried to get you on the wire. I couldn't wait over; the steamer sailed. You surely can guess how I must have felt at not being able to get you!" It was in the nature of an accusation, and the blame seemed hers — Parrish went on. "Do you remember my letter?"

"Perfectly."

"I mentioned in it a fur collar to match your big muff. It's waiting for you in New York. You'll take it, won't you, to show we're still the same?"

"The same?"

"As good friends as ever."

"You got it especially for me?"

"For whom else? And it's very new. I assure you it will be quite in it for next winter. It's flat with a sort of ruffle, and then another band of fur on the edge of the ruffle."

Emily laughed with a joy more than adequate to the prospective ownership of the collar. "I'll take it," she told him, "and bless you for the thought."

"Then we are the same?" It was just because they weren't, and never could be, that Parrish talked of it so

much. He wanted, for some reason of his own, to make her think so — to bridge the winter's gulf. It might have been that without this bridge his enjoyment of the moment would be incomplete. There was something almost fawning, like the psychic counterpart of the leaping endearments of a great dog, in his constant reiteration to his cousin of the fact of his continued affection.

And she accepted it as she did the collar without too much questioning. For once reasons and causes didn't trouble her; all her analysis was focussed on the result. The result was the increasing of her opportunity. She was feverishly afraid of its passing; she clung to Parrish in a very agony of fear, and her joy came in a sudden realization that this very clinging was a part of the tangible she asked for. He felt the little clinging creature, and the chord of masculine humanity, with him so glaringly easy to strike, responded. He held her close with a supporting arm. It was sufficiently commonplace, this linked walk on a hotel piazza, but the commonplace — perhaps because she had never had it — was translated by Emily into a sort of glory. The author of "The Cuckoo" was very young in the observances of love; her excursions into the tender passion had always been so largely a matter of her own sentimental imagination, fine-spun subtleties of talk and of thought, that that which might weary the more sophisticated with its vulgar triteness seemed to her neither vulgar nor trite. She might have been capable, had the opportunity offered, of covertly holding Parrish's hand or sitting — less covertly — upon his knee. It was as if she had thought and talked herself out; there was nothing left for her but the magnificence of the physical presence. She

gave herself up to it as Parrish did, more abstractly, to his enjoyment. They arrived by different roads at very much the same place.

IV

"Emily! — Ralph! —" Mrs. Parrish had pursued them down the entire length of the piazza.

"Yes?"

"I've just received a message from Mrs. Dench asking if we won't come up and have tea with her in what the bell-boy calls her private sitting-room."

"Are you going?" asked Parrish.

"I think so; are you?"

"Shan't we all?"

Emily added her voice to the rest. "Does she mean at once?"

"She must; it's late."

"There's nothing in the nature of dressing?"

"Oh, I'm sure not."

They made their way inward, and Parrish placed his thumb on the elevator bell. "Any one would think," he said, "that we'd never had tea before. I've never passed such a restless day — nobody seems to be able to stay in the same place for five minutes at a time. To-morrow being Sunday, I suppose we'll be more calm — the little dove of peace will descend among us —"

The door of the private sitting-room was open in cordial greeting and, at her guests' approach down the long hall, Mrs. Dench herself came out to them. "Ah — here you are. Mrs. Parrish, I'm so glad! You'll forgive my informality, but I've been rather expecting you all the afternoon,

and it suddenly came over me that I hadn't said anything. Of course, you wouldn't know."

Mrs. Dench was at her most urbane, and her urbanity lent to the simple, friendly gathering a certain aspect of ceremony. She offered to the other widow the compliment of her hospitality: "Cream? Sugar?—" It was clear to them all that the other widow was eating her salt. To say that Mrs. Dench was not glaringly, conspicuously dreadful seemed a very negative method of describing her high dignity. It really took a situation like this to show her to the best advantage, to show how perfect her command of it could be. Ralph Parrish, with the freemasonry of his sex, was one of her intimate circle; David Barlow also; even Emily, with the lesser freemasonry of the single state, hovered on its edges; but Mrs. Parrish was of another element entirely. The fact of her foreignness was plain, and Mrs. Dench's treatment of it was masterly. If she was obviously the hostess, she was no less obviously the wanderer but lately returned from distant, unenlightened parts. She begged that the newer civilization of the West might set her straight, and in payment she would provide real Russian tea from a real Russian *samovar*. It was to be a sort of hands across the sea, lion lying down with the lamb, arrangement.

"You know," she said, "I think it's cosier in a place that one can call one's own, even though two weeks before some one else was calling it his own. Jane and I are perfect Arabs, we pitch our tent wherever there's an oasis in the desert; we arrange the little handful of our household gods —"

"They're so very charming — your household gods."

Mrs. Parrish herself had a tendency towards the pure colonial, but she could still appreciate that Mrs. Dench's things were rare of their kind.

"Ah — thank you. The small rug is old Chinese, and that reddish water color is supposed to be a Watteau, but beyond that I haven't anything."

"You're much too modest!"

Parrish had been talking with Jane. He now turned. "Mrs. Dench's modesty is the one thing which stands in the way of her success in life."

"I know it," said the lady thus censured; "so you've always told me."

Parrish laughed. "So I always shall. Apropos of nothing at all, I was thinking how nice it would be if to-morrow we should all celebrate the day by going to church. Don't you think we might? It would give us such an orderly feeling for the afternoon, and as I have to go back the next morning at the crack of dawn —"

"I'll go to church with you," said Jane.

"And I," said David Barlow. It was pathetic, the comfort he took in Parrish's society.

Emily explained how it was in the merest self-defence that she would join herself to the expedition. She would have to prove herself as religious as the men.

Mrs. Dench addressed Mrs. Parrish. "That leaves the old ladies. Shall we stay at home, or shall we go — hand in hand?"

Mrs. Parrish was taken a little by surprise. "Why, if you don't mind, I think I'll stay."

"You're wise. I'll stay too."

"You see," said Mrs. Parrish, "I'm rather a queer person

about church. Unless there's a clergyman whom I especially care to hear, or unless it's to uphold the honor of my family at Hornmouth, I feel that I'm equally saved by a quiet morning by myself."

"By yourself — I too — so many people all at one time — it's too much. Americans take care of their souls so stiffly. For me I prefer the freer continental interpretation of Sunday."

"There's a great deal to be said in its favor."

But Parrish couldn't agree. "We need to be held to account occasionally — made to put our best foot foremost at least once a week. There's an instinct of order which is usually suppressed, and on Sunday we should give it an airing. I hate to see things at loose ends. There should be a time — a time for gathering them up." He was standing before the window in one of his easy, characteristic attitudes, and he looked down upon the little company which his presence so dominated with an air as if what he said would be accepted. He left them no choice. He was installed; his position there in the charming, drapery-hung room was assured. The rest of them, with the exception of his hostess, were but passers — distinguished, if you like — honored and welcomed and made much of — but, nevertheless, passers.

Emily received it full — this impression of his establishment there; and she was reminded of that other afternoon when she had had tea with Mrs. Dench and received the same impression about David Barlow. Where was David Barlow now? The question could only be put in its slangier significance, as he was obviously sitting on the French sofa. But where was he as the centre of the group — where was

he as the masculine pivot upon which the feminine forces turned? It was said at the outset that he presented the masculine in great perfection — was its very finest essence, of a fineness and hardness which approached to brittleness, with the compactness of bronze and a hawkish gleam which contrasted oddly with the suggestion — unmistakably conveyed — of a cleverly constructed marionette. He had been too fine, too hard; his brittleness was never designed for rough wear. It had reached a point of attenuation; it had reached — with Parrish's new splendor for comparison — a kind of meagreness; the hawkish gleam missed fire; the marionette was left pathetically without motive power. Emily's love for him ended as it had begun with a sense of pity.

Her pity couldn't last, however. Her sense of it could hardly hold its own against her sense of so much else. She was in the midst. The flavor of the wine clung to her palate; the wine itself ran riot through her blood. She felt that the whole of living was to be concentrated into the time which would elapse before the morning after the next, and that time was already slipping. She was on the edge of a great excitement. The line that divides the credible from the incredible was rubbed out. She looked straight away down a vista which contained at the other end Ralph Parrish. Her chance of the tangible had never before been so close; she stood ready to grasp it as she might; her scruples proved their tact by their absence. It was her first acquaintance with temptation; but she didn't at once identify it as that. Her conception of temptation was of a struggle; there was nothing of struggle in this simple, unobstructed view. She stood ready — the desire for life was strong upon her —

it depended on her cousin. The situation was stripped to its simplest elements; there was not room for the hesitations that would usually arise.

There had been no word between Parrish and herself. They had walked together on the 'Tidewater' piazza, arm in arm, talking in a half-flirtatious, half-cousinly way of indifferent matters; and Emily, by the very simplicity of her desire, had unerringly touched a responsive chord. He had held her close, head bent down to hers; and she, with her fingers clasping the rough cloth of his coat sleeve, felt as she had before, when he had turned to her from his mother and taken her hands in his, that all her strength and her possibilities of strength and of sense were centred there.

That first contact had been the beginning of her great excitement. She was still held miraculously on its perilous edge. She waited for the full force of it to burst. It hadn't burst as she had walked with Parrish on the 'Tidewater' piazza; it wouldn't do so, surely, now as she drank her tea with Mrs. Dench and Jane and the rest. She had a sense of waiting — of a suspense which caught her breath. She found herself counting the time which measured the length of her opportunity with a new impatience. She thought of the calm certainty of the morning after the next, and prayed for its coming. Parrish would have left, and she, with her time run out, would have eased her fatigued tenseness over the memory of her opportunity, either seized or lost.

The morning after the next. She counted on — by the afternoon after the next Ocean City would have again lapsed into its earlier, gentler ways. She would retire more

into herself; she would let the Denches and David Barlow decide their problems without her. With her returned passion there had come to her the strong vision of "Mrs. Dallowfield." She was sending for blank yellow pads, and during the next months she would set herself to the task of making them less blank. Her counting rushed on and took in the possibility of a return to the late thirties. If she did that, what about the measure of her opportunity? Wouldn't it be extended indefinitely? With Parrish there — at the Town Club — at the offices of the wholesale fur dealers — the late thirties between . . . But she felt that she only deceived herself; her cousin's future did not belong to her. It belonged — at least that part of it with which she might have been concerned — to the women in the window of whose parlor he was then standing. He might leave Ocean City on Monday; he might go to the farthest end of the earth, but his position in front of that window — in front of any window which the Denches might call their own, however briefly — was an assured, familiar thing.

In the late thirties his position had been assured also — he had been free to come and to go; there was a welcome for him, a cigarette, a cup of tea, often a dinner. But all that was of the past; Emily bowed before the new order. Her bowing was actual; it took more strength than she was in possession of to hold herself erect; but this very lack of strength had its own rewards. It seemed to make lighter the atmosphere — to make of it a thinner medium in which that which was usually hidden from sight showed clear. Though she felt, rather than saw, the new order. She looked for its visible sign and found it in a certain gleaming strange-

ness in the eyes of Mrs. Dench. It was as if a flame crossed them rapidly, flaring and flickering, and leaving in its path a deepened amber — a dilated prominence. Mrs. Dench was still devoting herself to her most honored guest, still occupied with a treatment of the situation; but there was in her eyes that which was utterly at variance with her occupation. It was something back of the playing flame, only lighted by it as a streamer is tossed by a wind — a hard intentness almost masculine in its unveiled meeting with Parrish's more general regard. He turned away from it instinctively with a little gesture of deprecation which happened to fit in with a view he happened to be expressing about the continental Sunday. He didn't believe in it at all.

Jane was also of his opinion.

David Barlow frankly didn't know.

Emily cared less. She was bent like a reed before Mrs. Dench's hard intentness. She saw her opportunity winged for flight. It was as if she put out her hands to keep it, and suddenly it was too late — the time that measured it was over — had never been.

On the plea of a very real fatigue she made her adieus. Sympathy flooded her. She always seemed so well, and it was hard to realize she really wasn't. Was there nothing? Not a thing. What strength she had got her into the hall. She felt better then, but it seemed more a matter of will than of actual steps by which she reached her room. She shut and locked the door — shut and locked the door leading into the room occupied by her maid. She picked up a kind of knitted coverlid that hung folded over the back of a chair and wrapped it round her. Then she walked

deliberately over to her bed and lay down. She lay there, still at the edge of her great excitement, still waiting for the full force of it to burst. It did so presently in loud, wrenching sobs. Her whole body was shaken; she cowered and recoiled, and her sobs — tearless — were like these flinching movements made audible.

CHAPTER XIII

LAUS VENERIS

I

THE reflection of the sun's light still in the sky dimmed to grayness; and the wind veered to the east, driving in from the sea a thin sea fog that came through the open window and hung about the room in little vaporous masses. They settled lightly here and there, touching objects of their choice with slender, floating tendrils which themselves rested and clung, letting the larger masses pass them. Emily was conscious of soft moisture on the cheek unprotected by her pillow, and the knitted coverlid was wet. She was conscious, also, of the smell of the salt and the heavy break of the surf below. She found herself waiting for it, listening as the sound gathered and deepened and seemed to hang suspended breathlessly. She thought of the sea as a giant clock with ticks widely interspaced.

It didn't tell her, however, the thing for which clocks are supposed to exist. It might be midnight; it might be the darkened hour before dawn; it might be early evening. She had been aware, dimly, of sounds within the 'Tide-water'—of that nameless movement which even in the quietest of hotels makes itself felt at the dinner hour. There had been in the air the faint scraping of violins, a vibration rather than music. She had heard at her door the solicitous

voice of her cousin Laura. But now the sounds within the 'Tidewater' had sunk to a blessed quiet; the booming surf had undisturbed and glorious possession. It was loud and deep and even; and under its mesmeric influence she must have fallen into a light doze, for she knew that people were knocking at the door which led to her maid's room, and she was hopelessly incapable of either speech or action. The knocking continued more and more sharp, and at last by a Herculean effort of will she emitted an answering monosyllable. She was told that she had locked the door — both doors. The fact seemed self-evident. She must open them. But why? In order to let them in. And who were they? Her maid and her cousin Laura. But she detected the deeper masculine burr. The request in this key took the note of a command. She rose and made her stumbling way across the floor, fumbled with the lock, and at last stood revealed in the flooding electricity.

She was a strange little figure, with her crumpled dress and her disordered hair and her face, that was usually so evenly white, blotched and congested with the recent force of her excitement. It had not left her more charming — this excitement. She was ugly as all things, at once violent and small, are ugly. She blinked owlishly in the sudden light, and at the same time succeeded in directing at her visitors an angry curiosity like that of a burrowing animal driven by intruders to the mouth of its hole. She didn't speak at first. No one spoke. But when she did, it was with the point and emphasis of an accusation:—

"Dr. Jeffries!"

The great doctor, who had been standing a little behind Mrs. Parrish and the maid, now moved in front of them.

"Miss Stedman — I happened to be passing — I thought that I would stop in and see how you were —"

"Happened to be passing at half-past three in the morning? You were doing nothing of the sort! You came all the way from New York especially to stop in — you were sent for by Mrs. Parrish." That lady was seared in the heat of her cousin's rising anger — "Why Mrs. Parrish took it upon herself to send for you is beyond me — quite. Who am I to be treated like a child, lied to and managed? Who am I? It's half-past three —" Emily pointed to a small metal timepiece which was conspicuously placed on the bureau — "half-past three and you all come knocking at my door, disturbing my night's rest, working yourselves up into a state of nerves because you think I'm ill. You ought to be abed and asleep. I'm not ill — not in the least. I never was better in my life." She followed Mrs. Parrish's downward glance. "You think it strange that I should have gone to bed in my clothes. Haven't I a right to go to bed in my clothes? You think it strange that I didn't have any dinner. Haven't I a right not to have it? One might think that I occupied a prison or a very modern and modified sort of tomb, instead of being a free citizen of a free country. A free country — Mrs. Dench can have her Paris and her Riviera, all her things —"

The last sentence was punctuated and cut short by the sudden retirement of the speaker. She seemed to have decided that she had said enough; the key grated in the lock. Her would-be benefactors couldn't get away from the realization that they had been unceremoniously turned out; the door was shut directly in their kindly faces. They were a second in recovering from the surprise of it, and then

Dr. Jeffries illuminated the situation with an, "Ah — you see! —"

"Aren't you going to do anything?"

"My dear madam, what can I do?"

A clutching fear was at Mrs. Parrish's throat. "Is she — is she? — No, I can't ask it!"

Dr. Jeffries turned to the maid. "Would you very kindly step out into the hall for a moment? Now," he said, "what is it you can't ask?"

Mrs. Parrish looked up at him in a vain effort to read in his wise eyes an answer to her unspoken question. "Oh, tell me without my asking — it's too horrible."

The doctor waited.

"It's about Emily — Emily's mind."

"You wonder if she's losing it?"

"That's it. Ah, you must tell me absolutely —"

"I do tell you absolutely. She's as sane as you or I."

Mrs. Parrish's fear still held her. "You'd swear?"

"On my honor."

"I didn't mean, you know, that she was a raving maniac — merely queer — unstrung —"

"You're right," said Dr. Jeffries, "when you say she's unstrung."

Mrs. Parrish made him sit down, and did so herself. She again begged him to be frank with her — to tell her what he thought without reservation. For if she couldn't understand Miss Stedman's case, who was there who could? She was her own cousin, her nearest of kin, and who had a better right? Dr. Jeffries demanded in return a frankness on her part also. A doctor was always at a disadvantage, coming in from the outside, and it was only fair to minimize

it as far as possible. Mrs. Parrish did her best to put him in possession of the facts. She told him how well her cousin had seemed, how she had been struck from the first moment of her arrival by her — for *her* — splendid condition. It was hard to believe she'd been ill at all; her illness seemed to have done her good rather than harm. At dinner she had amused them all —

“When you say all —?”

“Myself and my son, who arrived unexpectedly, and some friends who are stopping here, a Mrs. Dench and her very charming daughter and young Mr. Barlow, who, as you know, is the son of the Barley Bun man.”

Dr. Jeffries suggested the word ‘animated’ as a possible description of Miss Stedman at dinner. “And then what? What happened after that?”

“Nothing that I can recall. We had a talk late that night about a matter which concerned me far more than it did her.”

“You’re sure?”

“Sure?”

“Sure it didn’t contain for her some hidden meaning?”

“Oh, absolutely!”

“And then?”

“This afternoon she complained of feeling cold, — we were sitting on the piazza, — so I made her get up and walk about. Mrs. Dench asked us to tea, and it was while we were having it that this attack must have come to her. She left us abruptly, and as she didn’t appear at dinner, I went to her room to inquire how she was. She sent me away — rudely — it was almost as if she’d sworn at me. I was worried, I had a sort of panic —”

"And then?" The doctor held her to the facts of her narration.

"And then I met young Mr. Barlow in the hall. He seemed to divine my trouble; he asked me if there was anything he could do. It was he who suggested sending for you. We telephoned — you know the rest. You caught the midnight train; Mr. Barlow met you at the station; here you are. I can see that you curse me for cheating you of a night's sleep."

"Ah — I've learned not to think of that." He seemed bent on a close examination of the wicker arm of his chair, and Mrs. Parrish hesitated to interrupt him. She left him to his silence, and her patience was at last rewarded. "I trust you'll understand," he said, "that it's wholly in an effort to get at the facts that I ask you if this young Mr. Barlow hasn't a rather personal interest in your cousin?"

"Not at all. I'm sure I wish he had; I couldn't imagine anything nicer; but he's very much interested in another young lady."

"Is his interest in this other young lady comparatively recent?"

"No, I think it's been going on for some time."

"This talk — you'll pardon my persistence — this talk that you and Miss Stedman had last night, did it concern Mr. Barlow?"

"No, only indirectly. It concerned my son."

"The reason I ask is that she's evidently been through some great excitement — received some vital shock — but of course if you have no knowledge of it, there's nothing more to be said. She's not ill, and she's not insane. She ought to be diverted — amused — taken away. It's the

sort of thing before which we find ourselves particularly helpless."

"I'm sure you're mistaken about her having received a shock. Isn't it merely a return of her first illness?"

"In a sense, yes. But it's not as serious. A woman like your cousin gradually burns herself out. She hasn't it in her to receive vital shocks very often. They take, you know, a certain native vitality." Dr. Jeffries rose.

"You're going?"

"As I said, it's the sort of thing before which I find myself helpless. Divert her — amuse her — take her away."

Mrs. Parrish rose also. "Just one word. Would you be so very kind as to settle this little matter with *me*? I feel a responsibility about your having come, and as long as you can really do nothing for my cousin... My address is Hornmouth."

He treated the question of settling with the disdain of greatness. "Hornmouth's a charming old town. I always remember with such pleasure a visit that I once paid there to my old friend and teacher, Dr. Rainor."

"You know Dr. Rainor?"

"Indeed, yes, and I've had the honor of meeting your uncle, Miss Stedman's father. His death was a sad loss to science."

"Ah — I know —"

Dr. Jeffries had got into his overcoat, and he was now drawing on his gloves. "You come of a very distinguished family, Mrs. Parrish, a line of scholars and scientists of which you may be justly proud. In this present-day world of glitter and rush a whole-hearted devotion to an intellectual cause is rare. Your little cousin," — he nodded towards

the closed door, — “your little cousin, there, has a gleam of it. I have never read her book. I get little time for the contemporary novel, and I imagine ‘The Cuckoo’ comes very much under that head. If it wasn’t for this bothersome habit of hers of going completely to smash . . . The force of the engine is too great for the strength of the machine. She hasn’t learned to economize it; there’s a constant waste of energy going on within herself. She’s possessed with a perfectly normal desire for the normal things with which normal people furnish their lives; she hasn’t learned the great lesson that those things are not for her. It’s the old, old story of the man who tries to lift himself by his bootstraps.”

Mrs. Parrish had with difficulty been keeping up with her celebrated visitor’s exuberance of imagery. She cloaked her breathlessness — “Ah — how well you understand her!”

“Passably, passably. Well, I must be off. I hear my faithful automobile snorting impatiently. It followed me down here, as there is no train back which would get me in town at the time I must be there. Good-by.”

He was gone, and Mrs. Parrish remained where he had left her, staring blankly at the blank white door which led into her cousin’s room.

II

“I suppose you’ve heard the extraordinary news?”

Mrs. Parrish shot it out at her son before he had even had time to unfold his napkin. She had been waiting for him and had watched him with an undisguised impatience as he made his leisurely way through the big dining room. His perfection irritated her. She herself was a trifle worn from

her night's vigil; she had effaced the look of it in an added spotlessness, — if such a thing were possible, — but the strain was there. He was so marked by the absence of strain, so sleek and so shaven, his night's sleep and morning's toilet so successful. He had been like that as a boy, meeting the new day with a freshness which confused the less fortunate; he had been then, as now, often the cause of the surrounding disturbance.

He unfolded his napkin and spread it across his well-trouserred knees; he picked up the menu card and wavered long in a choice between bacon and eggs and broiled mackerel. "What news?"

"About Emily."

"No, I've heard nothing about Emily except that she wasn't feeling very well last night."

"She was feeling extremely ill, but it hasn't prevented her from going to New York."

Parrish stared. "To New York? I should think it was extraordinary!"

"It would be difficult," said Mrs. Parrish, "for anything to be more so."

"But I don't understand. How did she get to New York? There is no train early Sunday morning."

"She went in Dr. Jeffries' automobile."

"Dr. Jeffries?"

"I sent for Dr. Jeffries because she seemed ill, and when he came, she shut the door in his face — she would have none of him. We had a little talk, he and I, and when he went down to get into his machine to go back, there he found her sitting waiting for him. He returned and told me, but he wouldn't force her to stay; he said if she really wanted to

go, it was the best thing for her. We saw to it that she was well wrapped up —”

“Mother dear — I think you all must have gone out of your heads! Why didn’t you call me?”

“You’d have done no good. And you must remember that it was nearly four o’clock. Mr. Barlow gave me all the assistance necessary. He got Dr. Jeffries for me — he calmed the hysterics of Emily’s maid — he explained to the night clerk what a usual proceeding it was that a lady should decide to go to New York at four in the morning. Really, he was most kind.”

“Has she left for good?”

“Yes, for good. Her things are being packed now.”

Parrish was suddenly struck with a happy possibility. “Is Barlow packing them?”

His mother seemed to consider the question unworthy. He changed his tone. “But why — why? What put it into her head?”

“You mean the idea of her sudden departure? You know more about that than I do. She left with your name on her lips.”

Parrish was obviously worried. “What — in heaven’s name?”

“She said I was right about you — you *were* capable of anything.”

“Capable?”

Mrs. Parrish made a supreme effort. “I think she thinks that you and Mrs. Dench are — what shall I say? — well, that there’s more than there ought to be between you. I think it’s why she’s leaving — she doesn’t like it.”

“If it were true,” said Parrish, “I shouldn’t like it myself.

My standards may be low, but they're not as low as that!"

"You mean? —"

"I mean I'm not given to poaching on other men's preserves."

Mrs. Parrish was slow. "Whose preserves do you mean?"

"To be disgracefully frank, I mean David Barlow's."

"But Emily gave me to understand that he was practically engaged to the daughter."

"The daughter — fiddlesticks!"

Jane, in a dull black dress, — she always wore black on Sunday, — was eating a solitary breakfast, and she smiled over at them from her distant table. The dress was commented on. Mrs. Parrish thought the custom savored of Romishness. Her son rather liked it.

"Well —" Mrs. Parrish hesitated, "it surely is a fault in the right direction. Does Mrs. Dench? —" She paused, expectant.

"Mrs. Dench? Lord, no! —"

"She seems to be a very interesting woman. She's been in such interesting places. She was telling me something of her nomad life last evening."

Parrish broke open a muffin. "Yes," he said, "she's a perfect mine of anecdote."

"But on the whole I prefer Jane."

"In spite of the black dress?"

"In spite of the black dress."

Jane came over to them when her breakfast was ended and inquired about their cousin. "I'm so sorry that Miss Stedman's not feeling up to the mark. If there's anything

we can do, — mother asked me to tell you, — we'd be only too delighted."

"Why, thank you, you're kind; but Emily was feeling better and she's gone to New York most unexpectedly."

"She hasn't! Well, of course, then she must be feeling better."

"Oh," said Parrish, "ever so much!"

"I'm glad," said Jane, "ever so glad." She lingered and hovered, and Parrish, who had arisen to his feet at her coming, asked her to sit down with them. But she couldn't do that. "Mother is not yet up, and she'll wonder where I am. You're not forgetting, Mr. Parrish, that you're going to church with me?"

"Never in the world!"

"Ah, you mustn't . . . I'll be downstairs at half-past ten."

Parrish watched her as she turned away, slim and tall, and his slate eyes deepened as if to the deliberation of a problem. He liked Jane almost as much as his mother liked her; he was very much alive to her rare qualities; he realized, perhaps more than his mother, their advantages. With most young men Jane's beauty and the strong freshness of her youth would sufficiently recommend her; but Parrish had seen beauty before — the contents of a bottle and the gift of nature — and he didn't find it for certain purposes all-sufficing. It was the perfection of Jane's moral fibre rather than that of her physical which made to him the greatest appeal. It was her wonderful goodness. Her goodness was an impregnable fortress through which she looked and behind which she stood. That was as it should be; there was no such thing as a semi-fortified ground.

But Jane's goodness was not merely a matter of the specifically feminine virtues. She could be depended upon to do the right thing; she had a sense of honor as well as of virtue; she walked the straight path because for her it was the only one.

Later, as he knelt beside her in the church of her faith, Parrish's consciousness of her goodness reached a sort of spiritual exaltation. He felt himself in the presence of a divine thing; he felt uplifted — carried out of his perfect, usually too retentive, body. There was something far more splendid than the planet of which he had always been such an able inhabitant, and it seemed as though for a moment he had a blurred glimpse of it. It surely wasn't the church at which he was aware of looking so fixedly, or the quiet ordered congregation, or even Jane's golden head bent in prayer. The April sunlight slanting through a stained window slanted straight towards it, and the gold grew luminous like metal or a torch held in dimness. It was her only brightness; the black-robed figure might — else — have been that of some slender, ministering nun, it seemed so far removed from earthly glories.

But wasn't it, after all, merely an intenser earthliness — an intenser physical being than is possessed by the ordinary mortal — which made Jane seem transcendent? There was nothing about her of the pictured angel haloed in heavenly light. She brought to the spiritual something of her mother's dominance; she bent to its uses something of Mrs. Dench's extraordinary force. Parrish remembered another spring Sunday, a Sunday on which in the course of wholesale fur dealing he had found himself marooned in London. In quest of diversion he had walked the empty

Sunday streets and had come upon a band of Salvationists singing at a street corner. They had lifted strong voices to the praise of their God, and their faces, rugged from hardship, shone vivid in the soft London haze. Parrish had stood by with bared head; he felt himself then, as now, in the presence of a divine thing — he felt uplifted, carried out of himself — and then, as now, the rushing pulses of life had swept him off his feet; the earthly power of the strong voices and the rugged faces had been the final note.

He noticed the clearness of Jane's outline, firm against the light, and the fine straightness of nose and brow. It *was* her physical perfection — no, it was her physical nobility, which was also moral. She would do the right thing, she would recognize the right thing when it came her way; and she would bring to this second, more difficult task all the unspoiled sight of youth.

They walked back together in the sunny midday. The sun had burnt away the fog and the wind had died, leaving the sea like the great wrinkled skin of an elephant's back. The air was soft, much as it had been upon that other Sunday, and vitalized through its softness with salt and flowers and the indefinable chemistry of crowds. For the crowds had come to Ocean City; they were no longer a myth and a promise. It was as if Emily, in leaving, had sent them in her stead; they seemed to have sprung up in the night or gathered as to a fire. The place had been filling at times imperceptibly, and now suddenly it was full. Even the week before, when the Denches were reminded of the Riviera, it had not been like this. It had been cleared for action; the suspense had been held and had risen; the question had been asked. And now came the action itself

— no longer denied — and the answer. But Emily wasn't there to hear it. She had left before the play was over, disturbing its smooth course by the confusion of her departure.

The play went on without her, and Parrish should not be too much condemned for his part in it. His occupation with the moment — his moment, always — precluded his occupation with those past. It had been for him a mere flash in the pan, a final flaring — his impulse of yesterday; his impulse of to-day rested on solid foundations. It was conceived of his reason, his cold admiration — forged in the exaltation of his soul — and returned again to his reason, the nebulous beginning of an idea.

III

At the desk of the 'Tidewater' the church-goers came upon David Barlow. He explained that he had been settling his weekly bill, and taking that opportunity for a little conversation with the head clerk.

"Complaints?"

"Oh, dear no, praise. Of course you pay here, but you *get* a good deal."

"Indeed you do," said Parrish. "Why didn't you come with us to church?"

"Yes," said Jane, "why didn't you?"

He thrust forward a pile of newspapers that he was carrying under his arm. "I got started on these. They were too fascinating."

"I'll say this for you!" Jane told him. "You're complimentary!"

"Well, I saw you starting out and I had a sense — a sense — I should say I had *the* sense —" He hesitated.

"Not to come?" Jane helped him, "You needn't have, at all. There was no reason, was there, Mr. Parrish?"

"I should say not!"

Jane looked about. "Where's mother?"

"I don't know; I haven't seen her."

Parrish asked the same question concerning *his* mother.

"I don't know that, either. She was in the sun parlor a while ago. We had the nicest chat; she and I get on beautifully."

"Ah," laughed Parrish, "now I see why you didn't come with us. I'm my mother's natural protector, and you'll answer to me if you harm a hair of her head!"

"Let's go up," said Jane; "I think mother's upstairs, and, being Sunday, I think she'll have something for you."

"Not for you, too?"

"No, not for me. It's what you Americans call a cocktail."

They were convulsed with the humor of it.

Jane was right in her surmise. The cocktail, in its scattered parts, was waiting for them — Mrs. Dench, also. She confronted Parrish with his sanctity, "You're a true saint, and besides, think how stupid it is for Jane to have to go alone!"

"Don't you ever?"

"Oh, often and often. But there's something a little unsatisfying to me about the church at Ocean City. Every one has his religion, you know, if he's fortunate enough to discover it; he goes to it as a Swedenborgian soul to his hell, and avoids all others like the plague." She altered the position of one of the black leather-covered volumes, seeming in some way to point her moral at the same time that she

made room for the pail of ice brought by a bell-boy. "Set it here — that's right — thank you. David, you didn't go. I'm surprised; you're so overjoyed at having another man to speak to, that I shouldn't think you could let him out of your sight for a moment. Now, a woman could exist quite pleasantly if she never saw another woman from one year's end to the other — but a man —"

"A man," said Jane, "has so many little habits which lose half their point unshared."

"You mean his little drinks and his little smokes? Because I don't think David's dependent on those, and besides, I'm always ready to sacrifice myself to the good cause — I'll smoke with him; I'll even upon an occasion like this drink with him, though alcohol's a friend of my arch-enemy, fat, and therefore occasions like this are rare. It seems to me that man's desire for his kind goes deeper than that. If not in these days a superior animal, he's still generally conceded to be a different one; and with another of his own kind he finds a greater peace."

"He takes off his coat and rolls up his sleeves?"

"Yes, that's it. There's an ease of talk and silence, an understanding and an equality. It's the thing I envy most, the casual companionship between men."

"You should have been one, mother." Jane called it from the next room, where she was taking off her hat.

Mrs. Dench appealed to Parrish. "If you had a daughter like that, what would you do?"

"The question is, what would I do if I hadn't?" It had been decided by common acclaim that Parrish should have the concocting of the American national drink, and he was deep in his task.

"That," said Mrs. Dench, "is your present predicament."

"Do you think me clever enough to get out of it?"

"I should hate to see you try."

"My dear Grace —"

David Barlow had been circling about in a rather aimless fashion, looking here and there, examining with accustomed eyes Mrs. Dench's little store of treasure, effacing himself as he had grown to do when the conversation did not particularly include him; but at the pronouncing of his hostess's more familiar name he turned his head. It was the kind of thing for which one had to be prepared with Mrs. Dench; she allowed her friends a freedom — a freedom of which in some ways David Barlow had never availed himself. There were ways in which he had, of course — ways which might make his drawing of a line seem absurdly quixotic; it was usual to carry all the freedoms along together; but that was his own affair. He had never called her Grace; to do so would strangely seem to him impertinently lacking in respect. It was very often, in the ordinary course, Mrs. Dench, and once he remembered it was Light of my Life, but that had been drowned in her derisive mirth. Parrish called her Grace, with the casualness with which he might call him Barlow. That was it — it was the tone, not the name, that had shocked him to stillness. It was a tone he had never achieved with any woman — not even back in that glittering period before he had stood on the deck of the *Ballerina* and watched the boat from the French yacht.

It had come to him, a flash of greater brightness in the midst of the bright, still ocean, bearing the message which was to destroy him. Before that he had had faith in himself, visions of greatness and glory. After, the visions were all of Mrs. Dench, and the glory was all hers. If he had been given

to foisting the blame for his woes upon an unkind Providence, he would have cursed the fate which had brought him to her. She had seemed to wait, like a net set by a fisher, with the blue depths of the Mediterranean all about her; and he was a fish with golden scales. He remembered the prettier metaphor of Emily Stedman — Venus arisen from the sea. The Duke of Clopin's yacht was her cockle-shell. The Duke de Clopin had called her Grace; but it hadn't seemed to matter. Nothing mattered then but her whose name it was. And, before, he had despised love. He had looked forward to a long vista of blessed years entirely without it. He would still have despised it, except that you didn't despise a power that tossed you about at its whim — flung you and shook you — and held you on the point of its sword as a struggling insect is held on the point of the scientist's scissors. A power like that was worthy of something better than an egotist's scorn.

But its very strength was fatal to his egotism, fatal to his faith in himself — his own, individual entity. He felt it slipping from him — this precious armor of his personality — and a glimpse he caught of himself in one of Mrs. Dench's gilded mirrors showed him a David Barlow whose hardness was worn sharp and whose fineness thin. He lived, moth-like, at the edge of the consuming fire, and he found himself powerless to go, much as Emily — sleeping — had been powerless to answer the knocking at her door.

It came to him that the mirror into which he looked was his. His, also, the little silver paper-cutter with the stones set in the handle, and the rug on which he trod. He was a fish with golden scales; but the value of the net couldn't be reckoned in gold. It could be reckoned only in the thing

that he had paid, and he'd paid the price to which no man has the right — the thing underneath the golden scales — the man himself. It was in moments of doubt like these that he questioned if any net was worth that; it was his old dislike of being cheated, the appraising instinct which had made his father the king of Barley Buns. He questioned, and as he questioned he remembered. He was filled with the held impressions of things inconsequent and intimate, a face which in the dimness gave a mask-like illusion of empty eye sockets — a mouth cut from hard coral — moments of a kind of ultimate contentment and moments, whole periods, of a light excitement. He had had the dream and the reality all in one; the goddess had reached down into the hidden depths and brought forth the brute, glorified. Who was he, to question? He remembered the little lights along the foreign shore.

Parrish announced that his cocktail awaited a verdict. Jane was called from the other room. "You've got to try it," Parrish told her, "whether you like it or not —" She, as her mother, confessed herself for once willing to be sacrificed on the altar of fellowship.

They gathered about the centre-table, with its odd medley of books and bottles and priceless treasures, and they held their small amber-freighted glasses well aloft. Jane looked at David and her mother looked at Parrish, and a kind of embarrassment seemed to pass about from one to another. "Well," said Parrish, "here's how."

IV

One of the many things in which the 'Tidewater' took a just pride was its thought for the privacy of its guests.

There was the big sun parlor, the big dining room, and the long piazza; but there were, besides these, several smaller rooms adapted to quieter social intercourse, and also, on the upper floors, a number of upstairs piazzas or balconies. The convalescent could bask in the warm sun with little chance of being disturbed, friends could talk, and as the evenings grew less wintry the flirtatiously inclined could sit and watch the moonlight on the water. But April was still a bit early for that; it hadn't yet occurred to people to sit out of doors in the evening, and the hibernating habit still clung. Mrs. Dench and Parrish had undisturbed possession of the very balcony which was later most sought out.

Parrish's mother had decided to return to Hornmouth, stopping on her way through New York for a glance at Emily. She had taken her departure that afternoon, and Parrish had seen her to her train with a regret tempered by relief. He had answered gayly her Delphic parting word about leaving him to work out his own salvation; and now here he was, with the sea below him and the sky above him, and Mrs. Dench at his side. It was Mrs. Dench's idea. She had brazenly told him that she wanted to talk to him. She had told David to entertain Jane and Jane to entertain David, and installed them each in a corner of the gilded sofa. The very brazenness of it had left Parrish a little dazed, and all he could say on arriving at the balcony, which seemed her planned-for goal, was to repeat what had so startled young Barlow.

"My dear Grace —"

"You think I'm vile, don't you? But I wanted to talk to you, and now that your very charming family have gone, I see no reason why I shouldn't."

"It ought not to have been a question of their going, for they never should have come."

"It was inopportune of them — or rather, it was you who were inopportune!"

"I?" said Parrish. "I wasn't thinking of myself; I've fortunately nothing to conceal from them."

Mrs. Dench laughed. "And I have? Well, you never can say that I didn't play the right part."

"Did I ever? No one knows, better than you, how the right part should be played. I'd trust you to the end of the earth with a new-born babe."

"I think that's been proved by the way I've brought up Jane."

"Oh, don't take too much credit to yourself about Jane. Jane has a character which I'm sure I don't know where she got —"

"There's one thing about you, you don't flatter. Why didn't she get it from Christopher Dench? He was a saint — far too much of a saint for the diplomatic service; he died young. But Jane won't die young; she has in her enough of me to save her. Do you know I have a plan for her? If I can carry it through, it will smooth out many little difficulties."

"Tell me."

"It's to marry her to David. What do you think of it?"

"I think it's appalling!"

"Why appalling? She's horribly in love with him, and it would keep him in the family at the same time that it set me — set me —" Mrs. Dench hesitated.

"Set you free? Why, she wouldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole! Nor he her."

"You think not?"

"My dear woman, I know not. She may be dying of love for him, but there's a thing called decency which she gets from her father. You spoke once of the responsibilities of motherhood. You've met them, I'll admit, but you've used them to your own ends. In arranging so comfortably for Jane, and accidentally setting yourself free — though as for that I can't see but that you're free enough now — what is there that you want to do with your freedom?"

"I won't point out to you how well this comes from you."

Parrish looked at her. "My vanity's not so colossal as that."

"It has every cause —"

He faced the peculiarity of his position. "Since when," he asked, "have you grown so beautifully methodical?"

"It's not I, it's you."

"Perhaps you're right. Do you remember that astounding last week in Paris when you suddenly decided to come home and I was foolish enough to think it was for me? When I learned later, through my mother — the poor lady seems hopelessly entangled — that it was for David Barlow, that David Barlow was here, I was very near to damning him and you and the whole thing."

"It *was* for you."

"And David?"

"David doesn't count."

Parrish met this with levity. "I'm glad I'm not he!"

"You never would be. Tell me — if you so damned me, why did you come here?"

"It's a certain dislike I have of loose ends. I wanted to straighten things out — know where I stood."

"And have you found out?"

"It's exactly where I stood before."

"And where was that?"

"Why, nowhere!"

"And will it always be nowhere?"

"Always —"

"Why?" said Mrs. Dench. "If I do what I say, marry David to Jane —"

"But you'll never marry David to Jane — it's quite impossible, and besides, I have no wish to make it impossible that I marry her myself!" Parrish brought it out sharply — almost officially. His manner savored of the junior partner in the firm of wholesale fur dealers.

Mrs. Dench's scorn was splendid. "If you think she'd touch *you* with a ten-foot pole!"

"She'd have no reason not to."

"Don't you call Mme. Rostov a reason?"

"Perhaps — but not to be mentioned in the same breath with Jane's reason for not marrying David."

"You mean me?" said Mrs. Dench.

"Yes, to be brutally frank, I mean you."

"I see — you think the fact of David Barlow's having been my lover quite puts it out of the question, his ever being my daughter's husband."

"Don't *you* think so?" said Parrish; "because if you don't, you're hopeless!"

Mrs. Dench accepted it. "Tell me," she presently asked, "when was this wonderful plan of yours evolved?"

It seemed that it had come to him at all definitely but a very few hours before, though his liking for Jane had extended back — it rather antedated his liking for her mother.

And as for this last — they surely needn't go into it. Their memory of the astounding last week in Paris was still green. He hadn't liked her, and suddenly he liked her very much. She had occupied his speculative thought, and suddenly the abstract occupation had turned.

The thing she had which wasn't beauty; the sort of masculine good-fellowship which he followed gayly till the door shut behind him; the vastness of her comprehension only equalled by the vastness of her experience — the sum of her charm was like the charm of a place much loved, a great city endless and ageless, the very quantity of whose treasure appalls the spoiler, weakening his capacity of plunder. There was a sense, with Mrs. Dench, of infinite leisure. There was no hurry into recklessness; recklessness with her stepped a slow measure — so slow that its true nature was concealed — a very different matter from the light, mad cadence, like a Slavic dance trod lightly, which was Mme. Rostov's rendering of the thing the term implied. But the more rapid motion was better suited to the exigencies of a mutable world. The other, bred of a conception of time borrowed from the immortals, didn't always arrive. It arrived in one sense — in a high achievement of the intangible. There was nothing between Mrs. Dench and Ralph Parrish, and yet there was everything. But though not of the flesh, that everything was equally not of the spirit — the first circumstance was felt to be accidental, the second went deeper. Their affinity had its being in something almost racial in its physical foundation. If Mrs. Dench had been ten years older and had had a son, Parrish would have been the very son expected of her. And wasn't this relation exactly what he was proposing — the outcome of his plan for Jane?

She seemed to take it, however, as more to Jane's advantage than to her own. She asked him what Jane had done to deserve it.

"It's not what she's done — it's what she is."

"She's young, she's strong, she's beautiful, she has a kind of intelligence and a character which seems to you in a daughter of mine unexplained, — you see I admit all her qualities, — but I yet don't see why you're not very well off as you are."

"I am very well off. But I've come to a point when I should be better off married to Jane — you don't realize how rare all her qualities are — you don't appreciate her!"

"No," said Mrs. Dench, "I'm beginning to hate her. She's come between you and me. Before that it was David, and before David it was Maurice de Clopin —"

Parrish was aware of her breath coming heavily. He rose to his feet. "Let me go to her with clean hands —"

"You mean Jane?"

"Yes, I mean Jane."

"Can't you ever forget that she's my daughter?"

He turned and stood facing her. "I don't want to forget it."

"That's it, you don't want to. Well, go to her then, and with hands as clean as you please, but I don't think she'll marry you. She loves David, and David's hands —"

Parrish made a motion of arrest. "Spare me, please, the sordid particulars."

Mrs. Dench met his command. "There are no sordid particulars about David's feeling for me. It's the most exquisite thing I've ever seen. He gives me his whole soul — he gives me himself —"

There was a vague note of laughter from Parrish.

"Yes, you can't understand. You think that because you have what you call clean hands, *your* feeling for me is the most exquisite thing I've ever seen."

"I assure you, you mistake me!"

"Not as much as you imagine. You think that you've reached the very pinnacle of virtue, while really it's not virtue that you have to thank, but your sense of what is *convenable*. If I were dyed and painted — if I were in the picture . . . But I'm not; my hair shows the gray, and I'm the mother of the young woman whom you greatly admire. Does it strike you you're taking a tremendous risk? If you can't overlook her being my daughter, how can you overlook my being her mother? It's surely not in her favor —"

Parrish stared amazedly. The responsibilities of motherhood. The phrase ran in his head. If these were they, his impulse was to put Jane forever out of their reach — to take her away, at once, to-morrow, to marry her, whether she would or no. But she would. He staked his faith on her ability to do the right thing, and it wouldn't be the right thing for her to marry David Barlow. This was a way out; she must see it. He staked his faith, also, on her ultimate satisfaction with her bargain, and felt himself not unduly vain.

He had lost the thread of his companion's discourse. "I'm much more complimentary about Jane," he found her saying, "than she is about me. It's a thorn in her flesh that circumstances force her to live with me. She doesn't appreciate what I've done for her."

"You take her into your confidence?"

"She's not a fool!"

"I suppose, when Jane is married, you'll return to Europe. You came over, you know, especially with that end in view, and, having accomplished your purpose —"

She who was past-master of the tortuous became suddenly direct. "Why don't you marry me instead of Jane?"

Parrish vainly searched for words that would not come.

"Why not? Tell me — why not? I'm a widow, and there's no law, is there, against marrying widows?"

Parrish shook himself from his dumbness. "You're upset — you're not yourself — you don't know what you're saying."

"I know quite well. I'm endeavoring to satisfy your sense of what is *convenable*. I'd do for you what I wouldn't do for any one living. And don't for an instant suppose that I don't know what a fool I am! Now I'm above all laws — I'm free to come and to go, the responsibilities of motherhood are the only ones I have, and I can see you think that even those don't weigh me too heavily. People say that one can't be above all laws, that one pays for one's sins a hundred fold. I'm afraid I don't quite know what people mean. I've never paid. Perhaps I'm cleverer than other people; perhaps I'm luckier; perhaps I'm merely not the same. But that's all over now. My luck must have turned, and as for my cleverness — why, I tell you I know what a fool I am! I'm forty-four, and I've never had anything but a kind of reflection of other people's passions, — never one of my own, — and now it's come to me. I think I see you as they have sometimes seen me. Perhaps you don't understand. It's not the kind of thing one usually says, but my reserve, what you euphemistically

call my modesty, is sadly lacking — that, I suppose, is one way in which I've paid. I want you — don't you see? — and I swear that to my dying day I should make you a magnificent wife."

Mrs. Dench's voice, low and insistent, ceased. Parrish heard it through a blur in which when it ceased it was carried on by other voices that rose to him in a distant murmur from the piazza and from the board walk below. Along the walk lights were strung, a row each side in narrowing perspective till they seemed to join; and the sky overhead was dotted with stars. A dog barked and was silenced. There came a snatch of laughter from the piazza, and a song started and stopped. The sea was calm, and Parrish was only dimly aware of its swishing beat. His brain was confused as by fear, and what there was left clear was focussed on the swathed, seated figure before him. He saw Mrs. Dench in all her dignity sharply silhouetted against the doorway which led into the lighted corridor. He tried to answer her, but instead of an answer his words formed an interrogation.

"What have I done?"

"As you said of Jane, it's not what you've done, but what you are."

"It's extraordinary —"

"What you are?"

"Lord, no!"

"You won't have me?" said Mrs. Dench, and suddenly laughed with the humor of it.

But Parrish was deadly grave. "I won't have you — I can't — it's Jane —"

"I've told you that I hate Jane."

"I wish to God you hated me," said Parrish; and then, as his horror gripped him — "You're the most abominable woman I've ever seen!"

"Oh, my dear, be careful what you say — it's too beautiful a night —"

His disgust of her mounted to numbness, and it was still numbly that he bent down till the two wide mouths met. She spoke to him through his kisses, a broken inarticulate speech picked from the love language of many tongues — "Cheri — caro mio — my own dear love —" And with her strong arms about him she drew him close, and he felt the magnificent beat of her heart against his own. He straightened and stood; his hour had come, and he brought to its facing all his new confidence.

"If it's what I am you love me for, let me tell you that what I am is utterly vile. I'm on my way to Jane — good night."

Mrs. Dench watched him as he passed through into the lighted corridor.

CHAPTER XIV

WEDDING-CAKE

I

THE apartment in the late thirties was more than ever like the inside of a milliner's bonnet box. The afternoon sun coming through the gayly curtained windows couldn't find a single dingy corner. The little glass case glittered and shone; the brocade drapery hung from the piano in crisp folds; the leopard skin rug lay on the floor in a feline ecstasy of outstretched paws. There were flowers in two great blue bowls, yellow jonquils and tulips that seemed to catch and hold the light which was further reflected by the white apron of the maid who was setting the tea-table.

It was good to be back in New York; the cheerful rattle of cups and silver testified to its goodness. Ocean City, in spite of its name, was not really a city; it was all very well for a time, but after that time it palled. In New York one had friends and diversions; one's horizon was not bounded by the attentions of bell-boys and porters. The beruffled little maid had a very superior young man, a young Frenchman whose position in a fashionable hair-dressing establishment was of the highest. He spoiled her for baser metal. And then, in New York, there were the diversions provided by Miss Stedman — the people who dropped in at tea-time with talk well worth hearing, and the little dinners that it

was a pleasure to serve. In a place all one's own the drama of life was more neatly constructed than was possible in that which was desecrated by the trampling feet of thousands. The apartment in the late thirties was the beruffled maid's ideal of a home; its nervous straining in the wake of beauty seemed to her the apotheosis of elegance and ease. It was in such a nest that her mind's eye pictured herself and the hair-dresser — on the ground floor, perhaps, that would be more convenient for business, and with the big windows offering a background for much gilded lettering. Here would be the table for manicuring — her own especial province — and here the curtained space for the deeper mysteries of the hair. The little glass case enlarged itself in her productive fancy to a case displaying creams and powders, a spangled ornament or so, and a false curl.

But this was the merest dream. It took money to marry and set up in business for one's self. It would mean years of saving, and saving was a torture to the flesh when one loved ease. It was strange Miss Stedman did not marry. Mr. Parrish had treated her badly, to be so attentive and then suddenly to cease his attentions. He was in town at the very moment, yet he never came there now. She remembered him so well as he used to come, such a splendid figure of a man; she remembered the set of his collar and the hang of his coat. She guessed from something her mistress had let drop that he was paying his court to the tall young lady who had been at Ocean City, Miss Dench — it was she who was coming to tea — he might do worse, though her beauty was rather of the English type. And Miss Stedman accepted the situation with the most surprising calm.

All day she wrote at the big table by the window, and all day the blank yellow pads grew less blank. No Persian weaver sitting cross-legged before a loom could be more faithful to his task. She wove her fabric close and fine with the strong, fine thread of her genius passing and repassing along the loom of her riper maturity. "Mrs. Dallowfield" awoke under the new touch as though blown upon by the breath of life. It seemed as if all of Emily Stedman's foiled desire for it went to her making; the memories, the visions, the little ghosts that clustered about the desecrated grave — "Mrs. Dallowfield" was like a rolling snowball gathering them all. And Emily was at once her servant and her master, driver and driven. Sometimes she felt herself pushed forward by a force which seemed other than her own, and again it was by her own sheer effort of will that she wrote "Mrs. Dallowfield." She would sit there, day after day, at the big table by the window, weaving her fabric and herself being woven into it. She wove with the thread of her genius, and the genius was herself and the loom was herself and "Mrs. Dallowfield" was herself. She defied all known physical laws and lifted herself by her own boot straps, Dr. Jeffries to the contrary.

April had stretched to May, and now June was near. She wondered what the summer would bring forth. It seemed that it could have nothing left to bring, except perhaps a more definite announcement of Ralph Parrish's engagement to Jane. And spring might rob it of this last shred, for Jane was coming to tea, and for what else could she come but to tell her definitely the good news? Emily knew it already. She had seen her cousin — met him in a car — and he had been as full of it as an egg of meat; she had a letter from her

Cousin Laura in which the space between the lines was more than usually taken up, and one from Mrs. Dench that frankly intimated the approach of a family relation. "We feel very near to you, dear Miss Stedman, and perhaps the parting of our ways is not for long."

The thing she didn't understand was why she was ostensibly kept in the dark. In fact, her perplexity didn't stop there; the news itself was sufficiently strange. Why Parrish should take Jane, why Jane should take Parrish — the clean slate of her comprehension was crossed and recrossed by varicolored chalk; she gave up hope of making it out. There had been so much talk — talk that went for nothing; and with the expectation, moment by moment, of Jane's hand on the door-bell, she prepared herself for more talk still. But she was becoming hardened. One definition of a gentleman is a man whom nothing surprises; and, though hardly apt in the case of the softer sex, she felt that if it had been, she might soon qualify. It was the result of her plunge into diplomatic waters. She could smile at it and treat it lightly, this plunge; her own life was unreal to her in proportion as "Mrs. Dallowfield" took on life's reality, and in proportion — also — as her pain increased. She met it with a kind of apathy, the stupor of the tortured; the pain was there, but it was some one else's pain, and Ralph Parrish was the desire of some one else's heart.

Jane had telephoned early in the day to make sure that her friend would be in. They had left Ocean City — they were stopping at the 'Palazzo' — and could she come? She wanted to see her very much indeed.

The hour for that consummation at last arrived. Emily rose to greet her. "Miss Dench. This is nice!"

She was caught up in a swirl of arms and ruffles. "You dear!"

The warmth of the reception was unlooked for. Jane was not usually given to demonstrativeness, and Emily — in spite of herself — drew back a little. It was the merest shadow of a movement; but it gave her a broader view, helped her to see that Jane's enthusiasm was largely a matter of hiding her confusion. The young lady was visibly abashed. She seemed to find her mission difficult, and it was to get it over with as soon as possible that she announced it even before she had found a chair. "I suppose you know that Ralph and I are going to be married. I came to tell you."

"I wasn't entirely unprepared."

"You couldn't have been — of course. I suppose you think it queer that Ralph isn't the one to tell you. He wanted to be, but I wouldn't let him. I wanted to tell you all myself, I —"

Emily cut her short. "I think him a very lucky man."

"And don't you think me a lucky girl?" Jane smiled at her from beneath the brim of the wide English hat that was a survival of a past London spring.

"Yes, you're lucky; but, my dear, when any one's as beautiful as you are, it's not a question of luck. You simply crook your finger and it's done!"

"Oh, but it wasn't like that. I'd known Ralph for years before he even thought of it. In fact, we neither of us rushed in. I've been taking all this month fully to make up my mind."

"You've made it up now?"

"Oh, quite! I think it's the very best thing I can do."

Her hostess laughed. "Why, you're head over heels in love with him."

"No," said Jane, strangely, "really I'm not. But I have a dreadful sense that I some day may be."

"Why dreadful?"

"Oh, I don't know. Don't you think it dreadful? To be so persuadable —"

Emily gave her tea. She admired the big silver kettle, and was told it had come from Ralph.

"He gave it to you?"

"You're not jealous?" Emily jested.

"Oh, I realize that you and he were terribly thick; but I'm not a bit fussy. You know his mother has the most adorable old silver at Hornmouth. It's the most adorable place, altogether! Ralph and I spent Sunday there."

It awakened memories. "I was born and brought up at Hornmouth — in the little yellow house next door to theirs."

"Yes, I heard you were. But I don't remember any little yellow house; I think it's been torn down — quite recently. Mrs. Parrish said something about it; I can't just remember —"

"And where was your mother while you were at Hornmouth?"

"Mother came up from Ocean City when I did on Friday, and went straight to the 'Palazzo.' She's done most of my shopping for me. Did you know I expected to be married in June? There's so much to get."

"And David — where is he?" Emily had divined that the subject of David might prove awkward, and had not meant to broach it.

But Jane was calm. "David's in town with his people. He came up on Friday, too. His father's one of the most charming men."

"You've known him, haven't you, for some time?"

"As long as I've known David; but I haven't seen so much of him. He called on us yesterday. Mother said it was curiosity, but I said it was nice."

Emily searched about for a suitable comment, and, finding none, was silent.

Jane had been leaning back as far as her very erect little chair permitted, her hands twined about her crossed knees, her head bent forward. She gave the effect of not knowing quite where to put herself and getting out of the predicament with grace. She now straightened. Her whole tone changed. "Do you remember what I once said to you about David?"

"You mean about how much you liked him?"

"Yes. Well, it was true."

"I never doubted it!"

"Not before — no. But now you might think I hadn't meant it. It was foolish to say."

"But you didn't say a great deal," Emily protested; "there was nothing of any sort definite —"

Jane looked at her. "Really? I felt afterwards as if I'd said a lot."

"You spoke of his having been through so much. You gave me to understand that he was very changed."

"I gave you to understand that I adored the ground he trod on! Well — I did. But would it seem horribly disloyal if I said that I was beginning not to?"

"As you're on the point of marrying another man, I

think it would seem horribly disloyal if you said anything else!"

"Ah — disloyal to the other man — disloyal to Ralph! It's he I have to think of now. But I do think of him. David grows less distinct. And after Hornmouth — I mean the Sunday we spent there —" Jane's brows were troubled with a first comprehension of a universal truth.

Emily hazarded a conjecture. "Wasn't there some talk about your marrying David?"

"I believe there was. But you don't know — it wouldn't have been the right thing!"

II

If, before, everybody had seemed to unite in not telling Emily the good news, they now displayed an equal unity in the other direction. On the heels of Jane's visit came one long and voluble from Parrish; also one from David Barlow, of which it formed the chief topic. Letters poured in — a hurried line from Mrs. Dench, a triumphant pæan of praise from Laura Parrish, a judicial word from Emily's old friend, Mrs. Mellish. The very pavements rang with it, and wherever Emily went, it was the sole thing suggested by her presence. Ralph Parrish always trod a path rather marked; he had a certain native conspicuousness which in this hour of his joy didn't desert him. The Town Club was alive with interest, and the senior partner in the firm of wholesale fur dealers facetiously calculated the effect on the price of furs. Who was Miss Dench? Emily was asked it twenty times — the Denches' celebrity was strictly indigenous to Europe — and she always pointed to Jane herself

as an answer to that question. "Who is she? Why do you ask? Look at her!"

Together the young lovers seemed to complement and add to each other's beauty. They were the sort of pair after whom strangers turn to look; their arrival at any public centre was a signal for a general craning of necks. It would be an ideal mating — a union in which the chances were all for success — health, brains, and beauty, and sufficient gold to pay the piper.

Emily called at the 'Palazzo' and found Jane and her mother up to their ears in bridal preparations. The wedding was to be a quiet one — a bare half-dozen intimates — but Jane was too orthodox to go to the sacrifice unarrayed. Emily was brought directly in and space made for her in the midst of the confusion. She felt herself already of the family. A veil of tulle and lace was exhibited for her admiration. She touched it delicately. "*The veil?*"

"Indeed it is."

"It's not just what we should have picked out," said Mrs. Dench, "but your American prices are so absolutely ruinous. We had to call a halt somewhere! I had a piece of Mechlin which would have been just the thing, but in the excitement it seems to have taken wings. However, I should never suggest that the chambermaid at Ocean City knows —"

Jane brought forth a jewelled ornament, pearls and sapphires set in silver. It was her future mother-in-law's gift, and had belonged to generations of Parrishes. Mrs. Dench vouchsafed that she would wear it to the altar, fastened in her veil — so.

Emily applauded. "She'll be a vision!"

Jane was modest. "Hardly that. And I'm going to such a smart tailor for my suit. It's that new, thin serge —"

"For the price," said her mother, "it should be cloth of gold. Upon my word, I never saw anything like your prices. Living on the other side, one doesn't realize it. Now over there —" An intimate garment was held up for view, and there followed an elaborate comparison. "What do you do? Mrs. Parrish says she has her things made in the house. That may be possible at Hornmouth. But when there's the question of time to be dealt with — You know it's on the 5th?"

"You've decided?"

"Yes. You see the steamer I preferred sails on the 6th and that gives the young people time to get away before me."

"You're sailing? I didn't realize —"

"Yes, I'm back to my old haunts. The Duchess de Clopin has asked me to spend the summer with her. She has the most charming château near Tours, and how could I refuse?"

"You couldn't! But you're coming back?"

"To visit Jane? I may, if she asks me very prettily."

"Oh, mother!"

Emily murmured the conventional regrets. "Your friends will miss you."

"Oh, they'll somehow manage! Now that I have Jane so beautifully provided for, there's really nothing to keep me, and why should I make myself uncomfortable when the reason is taken away? I frankly am not sympathetic with my own country. I suppose it's that I've lived away from it so long."

"I adore it," said Jane.

"Well, Jane, you've got it, haven't you? You're going to stay here. Don't you think, Miss Stedman, that Jane ought to be a very happy girl?"

"But isn't she?"

"In a sense, yes. But when she's with Ralph, she'll sit for hours and stare at him as if he were a new specimen from the Zoo. We all know he's a joy to behold, but it's not as a joy that Jane beholds him —"

"Really, mother!"

"No, not as a joy, but rather as a mirror with which she looks into her own inmost depths. I'm sure I don't know what she sees there. She has reached the introspective period, but she's young — she'll recover! After the 5th, everything will be quite all right."

"It's quite all right now, mother, I assure you it is."

"It's tremendously exciting, anyway."

The talk drifted on, and Emily asked about the future plans of Ralph and Jane. Had they made any? Where were they going to live? For the summer in a near suburb where Ralph could come in and out, and later there was the possibility of a tiny house in the sixties near Lexington Avenue. They might be able to secure it at a sum not too beyond them, and the wish closest to Jane's heart was a place she could really call her own. It was to be, in part, her contribution to the general economy. She had a small inheritance from her grandmother, and for years it had been rolling up for just such a contingency.

Emily left the 'Palazzo' with a sense of greater cheer than she had had for weeks. She had held in her hand the wed-

ding-veil, fingered and priced the wedding-garments, talked of houses and living. It seemed to make compassable the measure of her loss — reduce it to the level of mundane things. She tried to imagine herself in Jane's place, and failed. Would she be having wedding-veils and thinking of houses? She would be encircled by too infinite a glory. Or perhaps there was no glory; perhaps the glory was all in her own mind. People married every day, and wedding-garments filled the shops. But as for marriage — for herself she had never considered it. Could it be that there was a greater glory when one didn't consider it? She felt herself on the edge of sophistry.

She was walking home; the distance was not too great, and the heat was as yet chiefly noticeable for the promise it held out of more. The avenue was gay with a rapid, ceaseless movement, and on either side shop-windows glittered. She looked at them in passing; there were jewels, clothes, and furniture, all of a kind to be classed among the luxuries, and yet in the aggregate taking on a dignified importance. They were the outward symbols of prosperity, the material rewards of success. But among them all there was nothing quite to rival the Chinese rug or the French sofa or the porcelain vase, and the clothes were no better, surely, than those she had come from seeing. According to that measure, Mrs. Dench's success was match for any. Emily pondered. Her brain seemed to rejoice in problems.

III

The 5th of June dawned warm and clear. Emily had been waiting for it through all the long, dark hours, and from

her thankful hailing of the light it might have been her wedding-day instead of Jane's. She watched the objects in her room change from formlessness, and heard outside her window the first twitter of an adventurously soaring sparrow. Her eyes ached, and as the day grew brighter she shut them, but sleep would not come. The marriage was at twelve. That hour seemed very near. The little handful of well-wishers were to group themselves about the altar steps, and after the service they were to follow on to the 'Palazzo' and to breakfast. David, the Barley Bun King himself, an uncle of Jane's who had come all the way from Ohio, and two or three intimate friends of Parrish's — without whom, he said, he would feel the ceremony incomplete — these were the guests, other than Emily. These, with Mrs. Dench, Mrs. Parrish, the clergyman, and the bridal pair, were to constitute the entire company. Emily had a new gown and a hat all lace and flowers. Some one other than Jane could have wedding-garments. It was early, not yet six, but she rose and went to the wardrobe which contained them. Two hours later the beruffled maid, bringing in her breakfast tray, found her asleep with the dress and hat laid near.

She woke her. "You get cold, and then you be not able to go to see the wedding!"

"Oh, I shall see that whatever happens!"

"Mademoiselle has lived in Paris for many years."

Emily missed the connecting thought. "Yes?"

"When you sent me yesterday to find if I can help in anything, she talked French, so I could never tell. She gave me a handkerchief she bought in Paris. Her fiancé came in, but she send him away — like this —" A chair was

graphically seized by its two arms and pushed. "She was so gay."

"Well, why shouldn't she be gay?"

But later, when the magic hour of twelve arrived and she walked up the long, dim aisle on the arm of her Ohio uncle, Jane was not gay. Her friends waited for her at the altar steps, a little patch of life and brightness in the midst of the empty church. There was a moment like the snap of a string, and she was among them, and Parrish stepped out to meet her. Then the minister's voice broke the tenseness. The most intimate of Parrish's intimate friends passed him the ring. Emily, leaning forward, saw the gleam of it as it found its final resting-place. She saw the back of Parrish's bent head — they were kneeling now — and the line of his neck above his collar. She heard the minister's voice — "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost —" What had that to do with it? "The Lord mercifully with His favor look upon you and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace that ye may so live together in this life that in the world to come you may have life everlasting."

It was over. The plan was that the wedded pair should lead the way and the others follow them. But Jane paused, uncertain. Parrish held his arm ready for hers. She still waited; and as she stood there, looking about from one to another of her surrounders, Emily noticed that her eyes swam with tears. She suddenly smiled — the sun breaking through clouds — and suddenly, so quickly that half the company had to be afterwards told what it was that had happened, she turned to David Barlow, who was standing next her mother, and kissed him. Then she took her hus-

band's proffered arm and led the way down the aisle to the church door.

David covered his embarrassment as best he could. "Well, David," said the elder Barlow, "it seems that you're the favored guest—" And one of Parrish's intimate friends professed to envy him. It was hardly reverent to talk thus lightly with a sacred rite yet so close; but the bride's own aberration had cleared the path. The pressure of surprise found relief in laughter. "Jane was overwrought," David explained it to Emily; "it must be a fearful strain on a girl. Think of it!" Emily thought of it all the way back to the 'Palazzo.'

There had been a tangle of arrangements outside the church. The bride and groom had got away in one carriage; Mrs. Dench and Mrs. Parrish and the two older men had taken another; Parrish's friends had started to walk, and David and Emily had found themselves in front of the deserted church in a plight which David had solved by hailing a hansom. The hansom succeeded in getting into blocks that the earlier carriages had the start of; even the pedestrians outstripped it; its occupants arrived upon an already festive scene. Mrs. Dench had done the thing with her accustomed perfection. The hotel rooms had all the illusion of the drawing-room floor of a private dwelling. Instead of the usual forced glitter of a hired setting, — the sense it conveys of being used for purposes of jollification day after day and night after night, — the scene of Jane's bridal feast produced the effect of a place brought forth into sudden gayety from a commonly shrouding seclusion. Where one entered, flowers and a stand laden with wedding presents were the chief notes of decoration; and looking

through the widely open doors, one's eye was arrested by a white-clothed horseshoe table daintily spread.

Mrs. Dench's transforming touch was everywhere. It was the art that conceals art, that air of high festivity and the apparent ease with which it was accomplished. It was in its way as great an achievement as "Mrs. Dallowfield." But while for "Mrs. Dallowfield" the possibilities were unbounded, the possibilities for the more material creation were bounded by hotel walls and glaring midday and a handful of ill-assorted people. Emily recognized the genius of a fellow-craftsman. There she was — this fellow-craftsman, — big, splendid, very much in the ascendant. One would have thought it her triumph instead of Jane's. It was true, what Parrish had said, that no one knew better than she what the right part was, and now her ability to play it was proved for all time.

Even Emily, with her very imperfect knowledge of the situation, felt that former measures of Mrs. Dench fell short. There was Parrish, a little awkward and a little self-conscious, responding to John Barlow's toast in an incoherent sentence; and the Ohio uncle, with a great air of discharging a duty not altogether to his taste, of upholding the honor of his house at a cost; and Mrs. Parrish, a gray dove with folded wings; they were gathered from the ends of the earth, and Mrs. Dench united them in her comprehensive grasp. She held the reins, and there was nothing for it but the pace which suited her best. 'This marked development of the social gift in one who was not, economically speaking, an addition to the social body . . . Emily was off on one of her long journeys of interrogation. She finally arrived at Jane's solution. Mrs. Dench should have been

a man. As a man — there again the path of inquiry beckoned.

The breakfast was faultless. The champagne was praised by John Barlow, who knew almost as much about champagne as he did about Barley Buns; and the cake — a monument of cupids and lovers' knots — stood forth in all the bravery of its sugary perfection. It was shameful to mar it; but Jane did so, and two of the 'Palazzo's' most impressive waiters passed about the cut portions. As Emily took hers, she addressed her cousin. "Your wedding-cake, Ralph —"

"Not at all," said Jane, "it's my wedding-cake!"

Mrs. Dench calmed them. "Don't fight, girls, it will be everybody's wedding-cake presently."

The Ohio uncle voiced his appreciation of the jest.

Jane was more communicative than the usual bride. "Now, do you know what you must all do? You must put a piece under your pillow and dream, and the person you dream about will be your fate."

He who had envied David was warmed by the champagne. "Well, now I suppose, Mrs. Parrish —" Jane started — "I suppose that if I dreamt of you, your husband wouldn't like it, and, as I should hate to incur his displeasure, I think I won't follow your suggestion."

"Your dreams won't bother me," said Parrish; "dream ahead."

"You see, Mr. Stokes, you're safe!" Mrs. Dench had always the right word.

Mr. Stokes refused to be comforted. "I'm sure I wish I weren't safe —"

"And then, if I know Jane, you'd be wishing you were,"

Mrs. Dench tossed it back. It was a kind of ball with which she was not wholly unfamiliar.

"If you do —" said Stokes, a trifle in the dark.

"Jane, annihilate him for the doubt."

"What doubt, mother?"

Parrish was on the rack.

The clergyman, Emily's neighbor and an old friend of the family, found in the play of tongues matter for felicitation.

"I'm quite overwhelmed," he told her, "at the spectacle of so much happiness. In fact, I always am at an occasion of this sort, and with two such magnificent young people —"

"You don't become hardened? You see happiness so often."

"Ah — it's one of the compensations of my calling, the happiness I see; for think of the sorrow also. Yes, the joy with the sorrow; it's all in the day's work."

Emily thought it a boon to have a day's work so varied.

"Indeed, yes, to feel that in some way — however small — one is of help to one's fellow-man — to comfort him in his sorrow, assist him in his joy —"

Jane slipped away to change her things, — Parrish also, — and Mrs. Dench excused herself to have a last word with her daughter. The irrepressible Stokes followed Parrish close. "We must keep an eye — we mustn't let him get away —"

"Do you think it likely?"

"You can't tell. There's a machine waiting at the private entrance, and we'll meet them there. If they should try to escape us — but they won't." He was off on his self-appointed guard.

"Where are they going?" Emily asked Mrs. Parrish; "but I suppose it's a secret."

"Oh, it's no secret! I've lent them Hornmouth. But they won't go anywhere for long, as Ralph can't get off. He spent so much time abroad in the winter that he's rather tied."

"Of course, he must be."

The clergyman had duties elsewhere, and John Barlow had an appointment at his office. The hour surprised them, and they fled. One of Parrish's intimate friends had sworn he'd be down town, but he simply wasn't going to keep his word. He was going to see the thing through at whatever sacrifice; it was not for nothing that he had been all day cherishing to his bosom a bag of rice. Mrs. Parrish begged him not to be too wild in his demonstrations. He must remember that the private entrance of the 'Palazzo' was private only by comparison.

"Oh, I shan't make a row! Surely a handful of rice won't matter. I should expect Ralph to do the same for me."

They were sitting about the rather dismantled table, and it was suggested that they wend their way downwards. They were only waiting for Mrs. Dench. She appeared while they were discussing it. "Jane's ready, and Ralph and Mr. Stokes are bidding each other a tender farewell. Stokes has ordered a large quantity of Scotch and soda that Ralph won't touch — he says it would be a mistake after the champagne — they're arguing it out between them, and it's going on in my room, which I was good enough to lend Ralph to dress in. Jane's gone in to see what she can do."

The Ohio uncle had his first familiar glimpse of society in the great metropolis.

They adjourned to the private entrance. Emily felt as though they had been moving from one place to another since early dawn. It was unbelievable that this at last was their final destination. She was Alice at a March Hare's tea-party, and her adventures couldn't have ended. David Barlow was near her, and she was on the point of asking him what came next, but was saved from the absurdity by the rather precipitate arrival of the bride and groom. They darted out from a hitherto inconspicuous elevator. "We've left Stokes locked in your room!" Ralph hurled it at his mother-in-law, and she skilfully caught in her hand the key that accompanied it.

Jane paused at the topmost step, her skirts gathered about her as though for flight, her laughing head thrown back. Then, with one straight, sweeping motion, she was down the steps and into the automobile. Ralph Parrish followed, and Emily caught it full — the peace in her eyes as she made room for him beside her.

CHAPTER XV

LA BELLE FRANCE

I

AFTER eight days of an unbroken blue horizon, punctuated on the eighth by the cliffs of Devon and Cornwall, eight days of throbbing screws and rushing waters, to wake into a quiet and a silence and to see framed round in the port-hole the slated roofs and gray masonry of Boulogne—it ranks with the remembered moments. Mrs. Dench, usually not sensitive to the purely external impression, remembered this one always. But to her it was more than external, it was very deeply personal; it marked for her a new stage, a home-coming that was strangely lacking in the elements of home-coming. Boulogne was France and France was home, or if it wasn't, what was? Surely not America. She realized suddenly that all she cared about was there: Jane — she did care about Jane, without Jane she missed the responsibilities of motherhood — and David, to whose presence she had become accustomed, and Ralph Parrish. Besides these, who was there in the whole world at the news of whose violent demise she would turn a hair?

In her own way she had always cared for Jane; though the time was not far distant when people, other than Jane, had been less definitely discriminated. People were very much alike; they were divided, for ease of handling, into

types and races and classes, but their common humanity was stronger than any mere variation of it. Stronger, in Mrs. Dench's sight, and more important. Though by nature and by circumstance a citizen of the world, she had chosen France as her headquarters, because in France this common humanity was the thing most emphasized. It seemed strange to her that the only people for whom she cared should none of them be of that country. It gave her a sense of expatriation with which as a citizen of the world she was unfamiliar. She had no deeper interest in the country lying back of the gray masonry and the slated roofs than had the personally conducted party of tourists who jostled her on the main deck; less deep, perhaps, because for her it lacked a saving novelty. She knew it so well — its conformation external and internal, the whole structure of its social fabric, the satyr's leer which was, after all, only an expression of its common humanity, and was seen at its best and broadest in France's great city. It was her great city, too, the city that spoke to her and once or twice had sung to her — she remembered that last Paris week — and had up to now met all her needs, spiritually, physically, mentally. She was on her way there to-day. Paris was the last stage in her journey to Tours.

She arrived at the 'Gare du Nord' at high noon and drove straight to her hotel, where the mademoiselle at the desk fairly drowned her in a greeting flood and the proprietor himself came forward with gestures of welcome. They had reserved for her in response to her cable the very suite which she and her daughter had so often occupied together during their briefer Paris sojourns. They hoped she would be content. The little salon had red velvet curtains that

might have graced a Napoleonic palace and only half screened the unexampled view of the street; and the bedroom, looking as it did only upon the court, made up for this carelessness by a rather gorgeous pair of brass bedsteads. There *was* a feeling of home-coming; the lady from Ohio couldn't deny the comfort of it. She wondered if on the morrow she would like Tours as well. She wondered, for one breathless, sinking moment, why she was going there. But if Tours was the price of escaping from the spectacle of Parrish's happiness, it could not prove too high.

Brushed and fed, she had business at her banker's and her dressmaker's. It led her through wide streets, filled to the edges with the teeming life of a Latin race, a life grimacing and struggling and giving the effect of surviving against odds. It was only with the aid of extended palms that it accomplished it even then. The beggar, the shopkeeper, the cocotte — the predatory instinct was strong in them all; it balanced their humanity, and it was their humanity — or knowledge of it — which made their predations practicable. Mrs. Dench felt herself familiarly one of them, and was unmindful of the smirch. In Paris she and they were in the majority; they were of the ruling class, and she was buoyed by the ascendancy. It put her in the right and Ralph Parrish and Jane in the wrong. Made bold by her support, she rated the newly married pair with the Ohio uncle, who had come to his niece's wedding, so he had told her mother, amid the protestations of his family — an intimation sufficiently trying. But now she breathed a freer, more friendly air. Steeped in it, she drove along the arcaded 'rue de Rivoli.' She saw through iron palings the sunny slopes of the Tuileries Gardens and fancied them

peopled by past generations of French — lovers, chiefly, strolling arm in arm and hand in hand, and sitting and kneeling and lounging on the soft, smooth grass. At this vision she was very much aware of the presence of her unaccepted passion. But her pity for herself was almost equalled by her pity for Ralph Parrish. He had missed his opportunity. He must now be moving into that little suburban house; she pictured it filled with half-unpacked trunks, and Jane standing in the midst young and helpless — and beautiful — yes, very beautiful. The mother shut her eyes to shut out her imagination of Jane's beauty.

Jane had been beautiful even in the days when she used to come awkwardly forward in response to her mother's request and allow herself to be made known to her mother's friends. She would be home from the convent for a holiday, and she kept her convent shyness; her mother's friends filled her with terror. Those were the days when Ralph Parrish could hardly have been called one of them; he was merely a young man there in the wake of Mme. Rostov, very handsome and very American. Mrs. Dench had admired him as she admired certain classic representations in the Louvre. She had been quite aware that he didn't like her; but she was accustomed to people's not liking her. They either did or didn't — and employed no half-measures.

But the time came when our young man went over to the opposite camp. Again Mrs. Dench remembered that last week in Paris: the first day of it, dawning as other days and giving no sign that a last week was on the threshold, and stretching on into afternoon with a barely discernible emanation of its potentialities. Jane had been away, spending a day and night with an old lady — her god-

mother, who had moved from Vienna to Auteuil — and as a consequence there was rather more talk than usual in the little gilded salon. Mme. Rostov always frankly said that she never could do herself justice in the presence of Jane, and now — in her absence — she did herself more than that. Speech had seemed blown from her rouged little mouth, light like froth; she soared to winged heights of jest and fluttered and pirouetted, winning for her pains the applause of M. Gadillon. It was Mme. Rostov's hour. Even her husband admitted it, and the De Clopins were entranced afresh. Parrish was alone left cold. Mrs. Dench had likened her Russian friend to a hunter whose call brings to him all the game in the forest except that for which it is meant. In fact, she had been so occupied with this analogy — she had little sympathy with the vanquished, the least one could ask of them was a graceful and quiet retreat — her attention had been so taken up with the situation in question, that it was a moment before she had been aware that Parrish's attention was all for her. He was looking at her, and her eyes inquiringly met his. He had answered still silently and silently seen the fluttering departure of Mme. Rostov with her husband. M. Gadillon followed. The duke and duchess in leaving took with them a charming young Austrian, the wife of a cousin of the duke's.

Parrish had walked back from the door to the table, and Mrs. Dench had watched him a trifle aghast as he lit another cigarette. "Let's talk for a while — you're not out for dinner — you said you weren't. I've never felt that I've really had the chance to know you —" The sublime impudence of it had held her enthralled — also, as the time went on, the sublime impudence of his having the chance

and never — in a sense — fully taking it. There had been a waiting hang — an atmosphere tense with possibility — and once, on the upper balcony of the 'Tidewater Hotel,' he had so far yielded to his impulses as to kiss her. The thing was unique in her wide experience. She wondered if it was because she herself had cared so much.

That had been in February — it now was June. Her life had gone quickly during the past months; the steady swing of it had left her breathless. It left her, however, very much where she had been before. Except for her daughter's marriage, her situation was unchanged. There was Tours on the morrow, and in any case there would have been Tours, the duchess probably extending her hospitality to include Jane. The problem of Jane would never again arise. But Jane had been useful as well as beautiful; she had given to Mrs. Dench's position a certain solidity, had done for her in that direction almost as much as the duchess herself. Jane's mother was not ungrateful.

Her cab had turned into the 'rue des Pyramides' and at the point where that thoroughfare meets the 'avenue de l'Opéra' it narrowly escaped collision with a vehicle which was moving rapidly down the avenue. The cabman wheeled his horse parallel with the other; and Mrs. Dench, shaken out of her abstraction by the suddenness of the movement, found herself side by side with the solitary occupant of the more elaborate turnout. As the smoothness of his own course had been undisturbed, it took a moment more to rouse him. She leaned forward and put out her hand in greeting, "Maurice, mon cher ami!"

The duke saw her, and from his answer it seemed that he thought his good fortune not possible.

II

The duchess welcomed Mrs. Dench to Tours with a grace and a cordiality which were only equalled by that lady's response. Never before had the friendship between the two been so close. If the duchess was conscious in herself of certain indecisions, certain lacks, which the presence of the other tended to offset, Mrs. Dench in turn saw certain defects in her own make-up, and her hostess was the very woman to redeem them. This system of mutual benefit was as workable a foundation for a friendship as any; it had supported this one for many years and was strengthened by the break of months. The duchess lost and forgot herself in admiration of the robust personality, and Mrs. Dench's more material sense of gain flourished apace. A warm welcome at the 'Château Douce-Amère' was doubly precious to a lone, daughterless widow.

The duke, who shared his wife's admiration and had been known occasionally to lose and forget himself in his own, found this cemented friendship a mitigated blessing. It gave either woman, separately, so few moments for him. And there was little pleasure in sitting with them under the cherry trees in the walled garden in the morning and facing them in the big barouche in the afternoon. He sought to console himself for their separate neglect by long walks with the young Rodrick, son and heir of the De Clopins, who was home from his English school on a holiday. He felt that in that direction he had never before made the most of his opportunities; he had never before seriously considered himself as a father. His daughters were a meek little pair wholly surrounded by instructors and

governesses, and of Rodrick he had always stood rather in awe. He had not remembered that at fifteen one was so perfectly master of the situation. From his round silk hat and Eton collar down to his polished shoes, Rodrick was complete — a Frenchman in miniature — graver than most Frenchmen, perhaps, but with a ready wit and an accustomed swing to the light cane he was rarely divorced from.

The father was surprised to find his son's completeness not altogether external. He had been informed that his scholarship left much to be desired; but he now felt that this was atoned by Rodrick's exceptional aptitude for picking and retaining odd bits of information that the more conscientious student hasn't the time to acquire. This aptitude, wholly French, and ripened on the sunny slopes of an English public school, had its flower in a broad theoretical sophistication. It was theoretical — the duke felt sure that at fifteen it couldn't be based on a personal contact — and it might as well be theoretically right as theoretically wrong. Their long walks bred longer talks, and during the course of these he would endeavor to instil into his son certain moral precepts which were the ideal, if not always the practice, of his class. Moderation — balance — a code that barred the injury of others; honor with women, as the duke understood it, one's mother — sister — wife — the wife of a friend — any woman whom there was a chance of ever making one's wife — and for the rest a graded rule in which the code barring injury to others was still to be remembered in all its ramifications: that was the text of his sermon, the substance of his philosophy. His pulpit was a seat cut in the stone wall which in remote, wooded places bordered the grounds of 'Douce-Amère.'

In front a stream picked its way among moss-grown rocks, and overhead the branches of the trees shut out the sun. To the duke — heated from his walk — the shaded coolness was grateful; even the young Rodrick found it kindly, and advantage was usually taken of a mutually sympathetic mood.

The duke was discursive, his son in turn receptive and controversial, and the older man had to meet arguments and answer questions. He sometimes found himself utterly refuted and was aghast at the wisdom of fifteen: "If, as you say, there is a graded rule, it must land one finally among women with whom there is no honor. Then the rule stops, and then what?" "Honor to one's self —" "Ah — you hadn't mentioned it. But if one should be willing to throw it to the winds —" "My son, there are depths even in the abyss —" But this and similar finenesses were above fifteen's refutation, and for answer Rodrick would flick the moss with his cane. The thing that really interested his precocious little brain was also the thing his insular training had taught him was none of his business.

Women, collectively and theoretically, he could discuss forever without once encroaching upon the conventions; but woman, singly and concretely, the woman of reality and not of theory, her he must not mention. Mrs. Dench appealed to his young imagination; his curiosity played about her, and, though up to now he had seen her but rarely, he had always remembered her. He had caught from his elders the trick of filing away a picked portion of his acquaintance for future reference — a portion which very much included Mrs. Dench — and for her the future ref-

erence had arrived. Her position in his family would have alone made her worthy of his speculation; but she had other claims besides. When he was a very small boy, it had been the habit of the ladies who frequented his parents' house to take him on their knees and fondle him and make much of him. This had always bored him, and he had had the sharpness to divine it was not for him, but for the gentlemen whom they looked at the while under drooping lashes. But Mrs. Dench, on the contrary, had seemed unaware of his existence. The English in him liked that, and the youth which despises pretence.

She still ignored him, and thereby gave his imagination a free field. Boyishly he wanted her to notice him. He wanted the chance to notice her, to see for himself what it was that held her admirers enchained, — the fact couldn't be blinked that she wasn't young, — and he never recognized the predestined failure of the enterprise. But his discovery was already made, had he but known it, his search rewarded, in the very reason of his desire for it. Woman of reality as she undoubtedly was, Mrs. Dench had as a gift from her God the talent of throwing about her a kind of emanation of mystery. She performed this feat without conscious effort; she had no longing for the rôle of *femme incomprise*; though her mystery was, after all, not quite of that sort — it was nearer a species of hypnotism — a personal magnetism compelling conjecture. She was pitched loud in a harmony all hers; it had been Emily Stedman who had said of her that she made the rest of the world look like a photograph underexposed. It remained for Rodrick to say of her — or rather to think of her — that she made the Duchess de Clopin look like a fool.

He felt for his mother the true Gallic adoration, and it was the one thing he had against Mrs. Dench, this new aspect of his mother. He saw it with eyes prematurely acute, the same eyes with which he saw the various aspects of Mrs. Dench herself. When she was driving he rode by her swiftly on horseback, and when she looked from her window in the morning, he was engaged with his fencing master on the lawn below. He knew intuitively that she admired bodily skill. She had a good deal of her own. In spite of her heaviness, she carried herself like a dancer; if her movements were slow, they were also rhythmic, and, more than anything, you felt her life from head to toe. She was the inspiration of a fairly scholarly poem which later created something of a stir in the English public school, coming as it did from the pen of one whose scholarship was not of the highest. It was in Latin and dedicated to Venus:—

“*Filia mundi, mater amoris*—”

The Latin master still has a copy of it in his possession.

The duke was not so favored. But that such a poem existed, though he afterwards forgot it, he at one time knew. He happened to stumble upon one of the moments of its fabrication. Seeing a slit of light under his son's door night after night into the small hours, he at last took it upon himself to assert his parent privilege, and entered to find Rodrick surrounded by dictionaries and scrawled paper. There was an almost guilty confusion, and the duke begged a thousand pardons for the liberty. He had not realized that his son was occupied . . . It was nothing—nothing, that is to say, weighed in the balance with the honor of his visit.

Thus entreated, the duke sat down. "Is it not better to confine your studies to the day?" He always did so. These were not studies. No, what then? He had long admired the ode as a poetic form, and regardless of incredulous eyebrows he went on to explain that these were experiments; he hoped eventually to bring forth out of chaos a finished product. He gave his father:—

"*Filia mundi, mater amoris —*"

It was thought to lack originality. Another example of his muse was tried and judged:—

"*Amica maris et soror sideris —*"

"Why don't you show it to Mrs. Dench?"

He fancied the last rag of his concealment torn away. "Why Mrs. Dench?" But in the same breath he recognized the arrival of his opportunity. The self-imposed interdict was removed; he could talk; he could probe; he could discover. "Why Mrs. Dench?"

"Because I divine that she — an extraordinary woman, Rodrick, believe me — she is in some way at its source; you have felt and garnered the thing I shall designate, for want of a better rendering, as that which you English would call her 'aura.'"

Rodrick was bold. "You've felt it too?"

"Ah — how could I not?"

"As you say, an extraordinary woman." The gesture which accompanied this corroboration was so infinitely world-weary — a settling and a stretching, feet extended, hands in pockets, head bent forward at the arbitrary angle of his chair — that it struck the duke as infinitely droll.

He laughed, and his laughter had the effect of bringing from Rodrick a fresh boldness: "You see, if you think she's extraordinary, knowing as you do all the extraordinary circumstances of her life, and therefore understanding them, what must I think her, coming from the outside and not understanding a thing?" The poem was put by in the interests of actuality; his chance to talk of woman, singly and concretely, might be long in repeating itself. He momentarily expected to be pulled up for his impertinence, and made the best of his time. "You can't know," he told his father, "the way I feel about her."

"Is it necessary that I should?"

"Ah — you don't see what I mean. It's the ambiguity of her situation that I feel; she's either a friend of my mother's or a friend of yours —"

"She's no friend of mine," said the duke; "in the depths of her heart she hates me."

"Then why? —"

"Why didn't she stay in America? She hates every one else equally; but nevertheless it's a question I've often asked myself."

"Of course, at Tours, she gets her summer cheaply."

"But that's not the reason she didn't stay in America!" The duke spoke more to himself than to his son.

But his son took him up. "She'd get her summer quite as cheaply there? Or is it that she's not mercenary?"

"Now that Jane is provided for, why should she be?"

"Jane?"

"Her beautiful daughter who married Mr. Parrish."

"Was providing for Jane her reason for ever being?"

"It's often occurred to me that Jane will have to answer to the good God —" The duke cut himself short. "I forget, at times, that you're only a boy." The rebuke had been slow in coming. There was a pause, fraught with embarrassment, while Rodrick gathered up the scattered beginnings of his poem.

III

At Tours and at the château the days followed one upon the other with more incident than accident. Rodrick crossed the Channel to his school, the Princess Karina — back from America — settled herself in his place with an appearance of permanence, and Mme. Rostov, it was said, had dismissed M. Gadillon once for all. When she arrived at Tours, — she and her husband took it on their way up from Biarritz, — she had in her bag a new admirer, one of her own countrymen and, it was whispered, high in the Russian government. M. Rostov's manners were still of the best. The charming Austrian, wife of the duke's cousin, paid her husband's relatives a visit, and autumn found 'Douce-Amère' the perfect scene of perfect pleasures. Mrs. Dench was reminded of the water-color in her possession, the one attributed by many to the great Watteau. Civilization must have travelled far, surely, and perhaps turned the corner, when gayety could be brought to such a point.

In America, also, civilization had travelled; and to such purpose that it had forged ahead of humanity itself, which in the mass had builded better than it knew — accomplished feats which in their greatness belittled the individual workman. In France humanity was in the lead; civilization

might have journeyed, but it had done so in the service of its masters. It made for perfect pleasures and high, mature joys, and the convenience of people who knew the game and yet played it. In America the playing of the game was largely left to those who had to eke out in spontaneity and youth what they lacked in skill. A real proficiency was looked at askance. Mrs. Dench knew the American argument — that the most decent excuse for a real proficiency was a real, and Americanly rare, leisure; and even then were the more fine-spun complications worth while? In America when they occurred they ended in the divorce courts; but that wasn't proficiency.

America seemed very far away from 'Douce-Amère.' If it had not been for the Princess Karina and the *Paris Herald* and an occasional letter from David Barlow or Jane, Mrs. Dench might have thought it engulfed by a tidal wave. The princess was full of anecdote — there in the 'Metro' there was no *première classe*; one rode, democratically, with all the world; and as for cabs! — they were for millionnaires. At the Barlows' she had had at her service one of their automobiles; but after, when she had visited friends in Boston and then taken an appalling journey to Chicago, she had been more left to find her own methods of locomotion. Chicago had made much of the Princess Karina, and she in turn had liked it, even though she found it more typical of the great country across the water than were the cities of the East. Mrs. Dench found it far too typical; when she had lived in Ohio, before Christopher Dench had taken her to Washington, she had done all her shopping there. The princess scanned the pages of the *Paris Herald* for news of Chicago friends who were due to arrive in Paris;

Mrs. Dench assisted her and was rewarded by seeing a notice of "Mrs. Dallowfield."

The book that the author of "The Cuckoo" had been engaged upon for so long was finally before a waiting public. It was too soon yet to tell with what results. It seemed to lack "The Cuckoo's" extraordinary virility — its realism was of a gentler sort; but genius was there, unmistakably. A letter from David Barlow confirmed this report. Miss Stedman had worked herself to the bone, the book was out, and the material rewards of success were still to come; though their coming didn't worry her — strangely. She was cleverer than ever, and he confessed himself won. Mrs. Dench felt safe in the confession's frankness. He had begun his long-delayed last year at Law School.

Jane, in a letter which arrived by the same mail, dismissed "Mrs. Dallowfield" with a line. She'd seen it advertised — she hoped the book of her husband's cousin wouldn't be too dreadful. They were leaving Blythedale Heights for the house in the sixties near Lexington Avenue. They had finally secured it at a sum which Jane thought they could barely afford; but Ralph would not balk at the extra thousands; it was modern and pretty and altogether suited them. They'd been very busy buying furniture, though the few bits Mrs. Dench had left behind her had helped them out with the parlor, and Ralph's mother had sent them a crate of things from Hornmouth. The dining room was to be pure colonial, but in the parlor two of Mrs. Parrish's chairs were to rub elbows with the famous French, gilt-trimmed sofa. They were to keep three servants — two women and a strong boy; in New York it seemed a fairly adequate force; in Europe, of course, it

would be nothing. In the spring they would need more. Jane stated, without equivocation, that in the spring she was expecting a child.

At 'Douce-Amère' the news was discussed with continental simplicity. Mrs. Dench felt herself already a grandmother. She could have wished that Jane had not told her; or perhaps the fault was her own, for she had gone straight with the letter in her hand to find the duchess.

In October the days were still mild, and the duchess was sitting in her favorite walled garden embroidering a gold cloth which was destined to grace the altar of the Tours church. Her friend's news brought her to her feet. She professed to envy her her happiness: "With all my heart I envy you. I long for the moment when I may take in my own arms a grandchild. The little Berthé and the little Celeste are still young, but I have ideas for them — oh, yes, I have ideas! This must indeed be a crown to your labors — a reward for your unselfishness. You took that horrible voyage across the Atlantic — you immured yourself in a terrible place called 'Ocean City' — but now you must feel that your nobility was not in vain."

Mrs. Dench replied briefly, "Not so fast, my dear, not so fast!"

They had attracted the attention of Mme. Rostov, who, with charming rusticity, was bending low over a late-blooming flower. Her Russian was not far distant. The two came up to demand the cause of the excitement, and the duchess unhesitatingly gave it to them. Mrs. Dench was again congratulated and felt, for perhaps the first time in her life, a certain embarrassment. It was an embarrassment that the others did not share. "And Jane was so pretty,"

Mme. Rostov was heard to say as she wandered back to her flower.

Despite the clemency of the weather in Tours, the occupants of 'Douce-Amère' were planning to fly south. The Mediterranean called; the *Jungfrau* was being put into commission. There was a villa in the island of Cyprus — they had once stopped at Cyprus for coal — that had a walled garden not unlike the garden at 'Douce-Amère.' The duchess had seen it and loved it and, such was the power of her wealth, now possessed it. Should they weary of life on the ocean wave, it awaited their pleasure. Olive trees grew in the garden, and the other side of the wall was lapped by the waters of the Mediterranean. They could fancy themselves tossed there by wind and storm, the duchess told them, and Mme. Rostov shivered. Her Russian might visit them, coming down from the north by way of Constantinople and the Black Sea. Mme. Rostov thought it wonderful to be able to gather one's friends and one's friends' friends wherever one went. It would almost seem like Paris, the only place in the world where one's friends were, without gathering. But Jane's letter now made it doubtful whether the gathering would be complete. The duchess had a high ideal of the responsibilities of motherhood; she thought of Mrs. Dench as leaving for America just at the time when Cyprus and the Mediterranean would be most worth while, and hardly believed her assurance to the contrary.

"I wouldn't go for anything on earth. I've done with my native land; it could only be a pain to go there. Jane, if she cares to, may occasionally come to me — she can fight that out with her husband."

The duchess stared. "Fight?"

"It would be a fight, I assure you." Mrs. Dench pointed to her daughter's letter which now lay on the seat beside her — "But he there sends me his regards!"

"I thought you and he were very good friends."

"We are. Can't there be regards between friends?"

"But you say that there would be a fight if Jane were to visit you."

"It goes without saying that a young husband doesn't altogether countenance a separation from his wife, however brief."

"He might come, too; before he was married he came often enough. His occupation — what is it, the buying and selling of furs? — brought him."

Mrs. Dench admitted the truth of all that. "When he comes, I'll let you know, my dear."

To talk of him made him less real to her — seemed to cloud the clearness of her remembrance as a window-glass is clouded by scratching. She had strangely brought to her passion a certain freshness, and there were times when it still held her even when she was most occupied with the highly civilized joys of 'Douce-Amère.' It was then she was most aware of its hovering presence; the joys and beauties of 'Douce-Amère' palely resembled other joys and other beauties, the brief joy of her passion and the beauty of the week — the last one — in Paris. She might, on a larger scale, have been Emily Stedman battling with visions of David Barlow. There were times when the feast 'Douce-Amère' spread before her turned to ashes in her mouth; she wanted water, and talk of it partly quenched her thirst. She who had been an advocate of action rather than of

theory had never before realized the value of talk. She more than once so far forgot herself as a diplomat's widow as to be tempted to talk to Mme. Rostov. She felt sure that lady would have understood; but of course it was impossible. Mme. Rostov had never talked to her. She would not confess herself the weaker, if for no other reason.

And it happened that there were other reasons to burn. Not least among these was her own saving sense of the ridiculous; she didn't see herself as the victim of a hopeless passion for the husband of her beautiful young daughter. Neither did she see herself in that aspect through the eyes of Maurice de Clopin. Her tenure at 'Douce-Amère,' Cyprus, the Mediterranean, depended almost as much upon him as it did upon the duchess. She wouldn't foolishly jeopardize it; it was too valuable. Mrs. Dench had, happily, a kind of large common sense which had come to her aid in the direction of her affairs before now, and she was fully aware that even for her the Maurice de Clopins didn't grow on every bush. He cared about her; she would do her best not to shatter his illusion. She knew enough of the character of illusion to appreciate its fragility. One laugh on the wrong side of the mouth, and it might lead to another and yet another. She would find herself carried on the wings of laughter to the wrong side of the door. There would be nothing left for her then, except, perhaps, David Barlow. She had once thought of David as a match for Jane; the plan had miscarried, and she now wondered if she might do no worse than some day marry him herself. She would send for him from the Mediterranean, and he would come. The audacity of the idea made to her its strong appeal, even though the last man whom she had asked to marry her had unqualifiedly refused.

But the contingency would never arise. The duke's illusion had nothing to shatter it. It was he — not she — who lived at the edge of the volcano. The dread that she might leave was ever present to him. During her last absence it was plain that he had suffered the tortures of the damned. "You'll stay with us; you'll go south with us? "

She reassured him. "I'll stay till you turn me out!"

"Oh, my angel, we'll never do that!"

CHAPTER XVI

DUST AND LIGHT

"And all about were dust and light,
Two things from which glory is made."

— VICTOR HUGO.

I

NEARLY two years had passed since the representative of the *New York Star* had called upon Miss Stedman at Hornmouth. He had done so then at the instance of Redding, the managing editor; and journeyed — rather against his inclination — all the way from New York in order that the columns of the *Star* might be enlivened by an interview with the author of "The Cuckoo." In those two years Fortune had modestly knocked at his door. A series of happy turns of her wheel had put him in command of a journal of his own — a small weekly organ, the underlying purpose of which was to further the combined interests of a number of publishing houses; but also containing departments devoted to politics and the drama, besides an occasional example of the scribbler's art it assumed to criticise. These examples were often unworthy. The new editor bestirred himself. As the opportunity offered, he personally visited those writers whose pens had a recognized skill and put before them terms it would be hard to refuse.

It was in the discharge of this business that he found himself again at Hornmouth. He had learned that Miss Stedman had returned there from New York, and that she was engaged upon a third immortal work. His head spun at the prolificness of writers, he thought them a race possessed of driving devils. No sooner had they breathed deep from one finished labor than they were in the midst of another. "The Cuckoo" — "Mrs. Dallowfield" — what would be the next? Whatever it was, he desired to secure for the *Folio* its serial rights. In "Mrs. Dallowfield" Emily Stedman hadn't duplicated "The Cuckoo's" popular success; but she had done something infinitely more worth while; her audience made up in quality what it lacked in quantity; her reputation began to rest solidly.

In his note he had recalled himself to her — recounted the occasion of their other meeting — so she greeted him as an old acquaintance.

"You remembered," he said, "when I was here?"

"Of course I did. Only you weren't here; you were in the little yellow house next door that has since been torn down. You see, I'm now living with my cousin, Mrs. Parrish. I've permanently taken up my abode with her."

He had learned that, too. He broached the object of his mission; but Miss Stedman wasn't at all sure that she could meet him. It was a thing she didn't care about, binding herself before a book was finished — she was too uncertain.

"Uncertain?"

"I have to do my work when I may. It might be years before I could turn anything over to you. All my life, you know, I've carried on my back the burden of ill health."

Her back hadn't bent under it; it had rather stiffened

to a conscious straightness. She carried her burden more like a banner; it shone brilliant in the paleness of her skin and the queer lightness of the eyes that were so set in darkness. Samson-like, her strength seemed to be concentrated in her hair, which was dull and thick and brushed high from her brow. Her visitor thought he remembered it parted and flat. But two years had left their mark on Emily Stedman in other ways than the dressing of her hair. It was not the obvious mark usually left by years; it was mental rather than physical, and so much a matter of the inner being that the editor of the *Folio* discerned it but vaguely.

As the author of "The Cuckoo" she had rejoiced in an eagerness — almost an appetite — for the life that was all before her. It had been the chief cause of "The Cuckoo's" success that though the subject was very consciously base, its treatment was very unconsciously fresh. She had come at her baseness with the invalid's immaturity, the invalid's inexperience, and also the invalid's unspoiled relish — the sort of idealization of the vulgar of one who has for it no terms either of suggestion or comparison. As the author of "Mrs. Dallowfield," her eagerness was narrowed to certain definite desires; her immaturity had hardened, and so been transmuted; her inexperience was less absolute. She still carried her burden, — or her banner, — her horizon was still in a measure bounded by her physical limitations; but she was within an ace of extending it, within an ace of the accomplishment so much dwelt upon by the spiritually minded, that of leaving her physical limitations behind her. Her body had always been to her a hindrance, not a help; it was the curved mirror in which she was forced to

see, and the feat she so narrowly escaped performing was that of turning squarely away and looking at the world undistorted. Her life was a constant knocking at the wall. As it is said that spirits knock to be taken back to their earthly estate, so she made the effort to be removed from hers without the complicity of death.

It was this familiarity with the wall, and the unreflected glimpses which she had indubitably had, that gave her, as the author of "Mrs. Dallowfield," a relish for baseness less unspoiled. As the author of "Mrs. Dallowfield," there were passages in "The Cuckoo" which filled her with horror. Yet she was glad that she had written them while she could; they had paid her railway fare away from Hornmouth, had made possible the development of her immortal mind. Her two years had been for her a mingling of failure and success. In knocking at the wall she had bruised her knuckles; in pursuit of what Dr. Guthrie had once defined as the damnably normal, she had grown short of breath. She was worn as fine as a stone over which a stream has passed; she was worn smooth also, and as she stood there in the big parlor at Hornmouth there was something in her smoothness and her fineness, the darkness of her hair and the whiteness of her skin — the dark note repeated in her gown and the white in the handkerchief she twisted with slim, nervous fingers — something which would have made it not altogether strange if she had suddenly gathered her skirts about her and vanished into thin air. She had a kinship with the supernatural; she gave an effect not quite human; you felt that her pursuit of the damnably normal had somewhat signally failed.

But to the editor of the *Folio* her failures didn't count.

For his purpose she was all on the side of success. Her name on the cover of his journal would have a definite value. He gave it to her in cold figures.

She still refused. She couldn't promise anything; she was really uncertain.

"It's my risk, you know, if you're uncertain. If my terms don't seem to you good enough —"

"They're more than good — they're generous; but I'm now so arranged that terms don't matter. As I think I once told you, 'The Cuckoo' took me out of Hornmouth. Well — 'Mrs. Dallowfield' has brought me back. If my new book should take me out again, I should feel like a Jack-in-the-box. I live with my cousin; the pleasure of my company is all she desires in return for her hospitality, and my own few separate wants are easily supplied."

The editor smiled. "So you can't be reached?"

"No, I can't be reached."

"You know I'm not sure that you like the *Folio*!"

"I like it immensely."

"Of course, if that's the case, I've nothing to say."

"What could you? You go back to New York to-night?"

"No, I'm spending a few days in Boston. I've some business there."

She consulted her watch. "I think there's a train at five-five. I'll have you driven to the station."

He couldn't think of troubling her, but she was firm, and his hesitations were interrupted by the sound of wheels on the gravel driveway. "There — you see! — it's the carriage now. You'll have to take it."

"As you say."

She had crossed the room to the windowed side, and she

now turned. "It's Mr. Barlow. I'd utterly forgotten he was coming!"

She concealed her forgetfulness from its object, however, who was upon them the next moment, a young man as hard and fine and smooth as she. For a spinster of uncertain years the editor of the *Folio* thought Miss Stedman wonderfully rich in young men. Two years ago he had found her in the company of her tall, blond cousin, and he now left her in that of Mr. Barlow, who, she explained, had just come from the place to which he was just going — he was studying law at Cambridge.

She gave the departing editor a moment's grace before she confronted David Barlow: "Jane has a son."

David was pulling off his gloves. "Bully for Jane! When?"

"This morning. Cousin Laura is with her, and telegraphed."

David laid his gloves side by side upon a table. "I thought perhaps Mrs. Dench —"

"So did I, but she hasn't."

He was suddenly almost fierce. "Why the devil should she?"

"She shouldn't. She'd be like a fifth wheel to a cart."

David made some inarticulate reply to this as he laid his hat beside his gloves. He was struck by a new phase of the situation. "I'll go to the hotel in the village."

"Why?"

"Why? With Mrs. Parrish not here, don't you see? —"

"Of course — I see. But you'll have dinner first."

"It's not inconvenient? You must be so excited."

"My dear David, it's just because I'm excited that I want you to cheer me up!"

"I'll do my best."

His best didn't seem much to boast of; he was more than usually quiet. Dinner did little to animate his gravity, and the work of enlivenment fell wholly upon Emily. She faced him in the big dining room from whose walls there gazed down generations of Parrishes. "David, David, do you think they know that to-day their ranks have been recruited?"

"They?"

"Why, old Carrington Parrish sitting up there in the bottle-green coat, and General James on the other side, and the original Praise God who built with his own hands the stockade every one lived in for so long. Do they know?" Her fancy played about that conceit.

"It's always struck me," she went on, "that if Praise God Parrish hadn't been so busy building stockades, he'd have built something far less meritorious. Don't you see with what difficulty he's fastened his Puritan collar, and how his eyes are everywhere but on the Bible beside him? I know the portrait is merely a copy of a miniature that was painted before he left England, and it may malign him. Do you realize, David, that some day my little cousin will be sitting here, at this table, in this very room, having dinner?"

David looked up. "Your little cousin and Mrs. Dench's little grandchild."

"That's true."

"She should have come." David spoke more to himself than to his companion.

"Perhaps she couldn't."

"Nonsense!"

They went on in silence with the conduct of dinner. At last Emily ventured. "If she had come, would you have seen her?"

"How could I not?"

"No, she's not invisible! But I thought that perhaps under the circumstances —"

"What circumstances?"

But Emily didn't balk. "You never quarrelled?"

"Never. Mrs. Dench quarrelled — with Ralph Parrish. She told me that America wasn't big enough to hold them both."

"Ah — wouldn't that explain her not coming?" Emily was proud of her find, but David Barlow told her that with such an extraordinary woman as Mrs. Dench, explanations were hopeless.

There was a note of impatience in Emily's reply. "Oh, she's not half as extraordinary as you think!"

David rose and came over to her side of the table. "You're not jealous?"

Her eyes communed with the roving ones of Praise God Parrish. "Jealous? — I've no right."

II

In late May and early June Hornmouth was more than ever charming. Mrs. Parrish's lawn was vivid like emerald; her hedges — newly clipped — were green walls of foliage and the earth in her garden was soaked dark from the spring rain. Beyond the garden rolling pasture lands met the pale spring sky; and in the orchard lately fallen apple blossoms

lay white upon the ground. It was the one time in all the year when the Northern climate abated its violence; the sharp colds of winter were left behind and the fierce heats of summer were still to come — or it might be that the two had met and blended to the palliation of both. It was a fusion the vigor of whose separate parts oddly resulted in an exceptional delicacy. The florid redundance of the more Southern spring was replaced by a spareness and a fineness; at Hornmouth budding vegetation didn't have too easy a time; that which survived attained the uniform perfection of the fittest.

The windows of Emily's room were open wide to the sunlight which served, at Hornmouth, a purpose utilitarian as well as æsthetic; for Mrs. Parrish's housekeeping was of the relentless sort, and sheets, blankets, and pillows were scattered in commanding positions. Emily's bed had been subjected to the process known as stripping, while she herself was still completing her toilet. She stood before the mirror putting on her hat. She was dressed unmistakably for town, and a small trunk — strapped and locked — gave further evidence of impending travel.

She was thus leaving Hornmouth in the full freshness of its happiest season — taking the long, trying journey to New York — with the sole object of laying a ghost. It had bothered her and haunted her and beckoned her, had come to her shrouded and white, and none the less appalling for being but the ghost of a place — the ghost, or the vision, of the apartment in the late thirties. The late thirties haunted her. The little gilt-trimmed parlor, that was like nothing so much as the inside of a milliner's bonnet box, seemed to cry out to be lived in. She had left it, merely turning the

key in the door, and she pictured the gayly patterned chintz faded white from the sun and the polished dining table dull with dust. Her lease had had a year yet to run, and it had been her intention to send for her things at her own good time. But her own good time had been slow in coming; she hadn't sent, and now when she thought of it she dreaded to see damaged reminders of former glories. She saw them in her mind's eye, these former glories; she saw how at Hornmouth they wouldn't be in keeping — it was one more reason for procrastination. But there was another reason — less worthy — she had merely turned the key in the door — it would be so very easy to turn it the other way. That was her temptation; the ghost of the late thirties beckoned her to come back. Without Ralph Parrish it might prove a rather empty joy; but she felt at times ready to take the risk of it. Day by day her temptation had worn upon her, and she had caught it so near to victory that she at last decided to remove it beyond all reach of possibility; she would have the late thirties swept bare — even at the cost of having her precious former glories cut for kindling wood.

The apartment in the late thirties was the nearest approach she had ever come to a house of her own, an edifice raised by her own effort to fill her own need. She felt for it the passion of possession; from the leopard-skin rug to the little glass case, it had been all so intimately hers. She felt herself in deserting it false to a kind of trust. Yet wouldn't she have been falser in not deserting it? Wasn't her real trust not a house but a God-given talent which it rested with her not to squander and debase? In Hornmouth her talent could ride free; in the late thirties it would be

weighted by the editor of the *Folio*. The late thirties without the editor of the *Folio* — ah, she hadn't the strength for struggle! The blank yellow pads that had once seemed to her her one avenue of escape from Hornmouth, now, by her loyalty to them, led her straight back there.

To-day she was going to New York, and a week from to-day she was returning to Hornmouth, houseless. She would lay her ghost with thoroughness; she would reside — henceforth — solely in her God-given talent. And that talent had been nourished by her residence in the late thirties. She gave the devil his due.

Mrs. Parrish drove with her to the station. "For a person who isn't strong," she said, "you do the most surprising things!" It had been Mrs. Parrish's idea that the extermination of the late thirties should be put in the charge of Ralph. He was there, on the ground; he could set movers to work and stop in himself on his way down town in the morning. Emily could explain by letter the matter of disposition.

But his cousin refused to impose on him anything of the kind. He had quite enough to think about without being bothered with her old furniture. "We mustn't forget," said she, "that he's the father of a family."

"My dear, we're not likely to forget it. You bring it to our attention twenty times a day!"

Emily denied any such garrulity.

Mrs. Parrish put a question, "When will you see them — to-morrow?"

"Probably. I'll find out from Jane when it would be best."

"You'll dine there."

"Ah — but I don't want them to feel me on their minds. They *are* wrapped up!"

"If it wasn't for the baby, they wouldn't have heard of your going to a hotel; but they still have two nurses, and the house isn't enormous."

Emily caught her up. "It was you who mentioned the baby this time!"

"I can mention the baby all I like. It's not the baby's existence, but Ralph's paternity, which always seems especially to strike you."

"Well, don't you think it is rather appalling?"

Mrs. Parrish didn't in the least. "To-morrow, then, you'll see them?" It was her last word at the station.

"Yes, to-morrow," Emily smiled from the car window, and would have been surprised to know herself braver than Mrs. Dench.

The morrow was a Saturday. She found to her grief that it would be impossible to begin the task of extermination till the following Monday. The clerk at the van company was adamant in the face of her entreaties. In June Saturday was a half-holiday, and had been so since the beginning of time. Emily solaced herself with shopping and a solitary lunch at Gaillard's. She might have lunched with Jane; but she was almost morbidly sensitive about bothering her, and it wasn't till after the hour for that meal was past that she made her presence known to her over the telephone. She was scolded for her tardiness and told to do for it all possible penance. There had been another who hadn't been as sensitive as herself. David Barlow was on from Cambridge, and he had dropped in in the morning and stayed on; he came to the telephone and spoke to her.

The house near Lexington Avenue was of the newer basement sort. From the street one went down to the entrance instead of up, and the little square of lower level thus formed was decorated on either side by bay trees in tubs. Emily didn't at once find the bell, which was concealed behind a column, and as it was a moment more before her ring was answered, she had time to see that, in spite of her baby, Jane didn't neglect her front stoop. Within there was still further proof that the young Mrs. Parrish was worthy of the old; the white-painted staircase was spotless, and the rugs which covered the hall were not guilty of a single turned corner. But the visitor's approvals were cut short by Ralph and David, who came out to her from a little room where they had been smoking and escorted her up to the parlor. Jane would be with her directly.

"You haven't been here," said Ralph, "not since we were in order. In the autumn, I remember, things were hopelessly mixed."

"They're certainly not mixed now," said David.

Emily was equally appreciative. "They're charming! I'd thought of offering you your choice of my few possessions — you know I'm moving out of my apartment for good — but it really might seem an impertinence, you have so much."

"Indeed, we haven't — I'm sure we'd be only too glad — you must talk to Jane."

"Does she rule you, Ralph, with a rod of iron?"

Ralph Parrish smiled till his teeth showed beneath his mustache. "I should say she did! Here — I'll go and see what's keeping her."

Alone with her, David turned to Emily. "Why didn't you tell me you were coming to New York?"

"Would you then not have come?"

He answered her only indirectly. "My luck must be with me or I wouldn't have seen you at all. It was the merest chance, my being here, and I want, very particularly, to see you. I was coming to Hornmouth next week."

"Ah — I hope you'll still come — I hope that seeing me now won't save you the necessity."

"Oh, it's not a necessity!"

"The luxury, then."

David was importunate. "I really want to talk to you. Where are you going when you leave here?"

"I think to Thirty-seventh Street; I haven't been near there, and I won't vouch for its condition, but if what you have to say to me is so very important — if you'd care to come with me —"

"I should care to, tremendously."

Emily's eyes were on the door through which the family, Parrish, were momentarily expected to appear. "I'm so anxious to see Jane; I haven't seen her, you know, since Christmas, when she and Ralph were at Hornmouth."

"And of course you must be very anxious to see your little cousin — and to hear him."

"To hear him?"

"Yes, can't you?"

Emily listened, and she presently distinguished a sound, faint yet sharp. She waited, and it came again clearer and louder, a shrill, broken crescendo of wails, though as lacking in conscious expression of grief as the crying of an animal. It was the voice of instinct, as discriminated from that of emotion, and compelling like the grating of a file.

"He has strong lungs — your little cousin."

"Yes — yes, indeed he has! Ah, Jane — I am glad."

The door had yielded its treasure, and Jane stood before them, very tall and fair, with her son in her arms. "I thought you'd like to see him."

Emily laughed. "He evidently didn't wish to be seen."

"Oh, he didn't care! We think he doesn't like to be brought downstairs. He's in collusion with his nurse, who insists it's bad for him."

"If he is," said his father, "he shows abominable taste. His nurse is hideous."

"His nurse doesn't have to be anything else," Emily turned to David, "his sense of beauty has enough to feed upon as it is."

"Ralph," said Jane, "that's a compliment for us."

Emily was looking at her little cousin with the awkward eyes of one who is not a child lover. She suspected Jane of intending to offer her the privilege of holding him, and it was a privilege she could very well do without. She was occupied in wondering how she could gracefully refuse it, and was thankful as the moments went by without giving her the chance — her suspicion was unfounded. Her little cousin was a being far too precious to be toyed with, more precious — even — than the Chinese porcelain vase that Mrs. Dench had left behind her and that now adorned Jane's mantelpiece. But in spite of his value it was, as Mrs. Parrish had said, more the fact of his father's paternity than that of his own little existence which Emily thought striking.

She had never seen Parrish more splendid. It was as if his wife and child had lent to him a dignity — a nobility. His roughly drawn perfection, which had always had the

III

"The Duke de Clopin's dead."

Emily was engaged in fitting a key in the lock of her apartment door. At David's announcement she barely looked up. "Is he? You mean that friend of Mrs. Dench's?"

"Yes. They're the people she's been staying with since Jane's marriage."

The lock yielded. "Things will be in a mess, you know — I doubt, even, if I can give you tea."

David didn't want tea.

The parlor was covered with fine, light dust. To get rid of the close smell of it they opened the windows, and it wasn't until this task was completed that Emily evinced any further interest in Mrs. Dench's friend. "How did he die?"

"He was drowned, in bathing, near his villa in Cyprus."

"The Mediterranean claimed her own?"

"What do you mean by that?"

The question was ignored. "How did you hear?"

"How should I, but from Mrs. Dench?"

"Of course, I forgot. Come, are you afraid of getting your beautiful clothes spoiled if you sit down?"

"It's not as bad as that."

Emily looked about her. "It's pretty bad. I shouldn't have left it so long. There isn't a thing here that Jane would thank me for introducing into her spotless place."

"Why, the little glass case I know she'd love, and besides, you're not sworn to furnish Jane's house for her."

"It's not a question of being sworn."

"Of course not, it's a pleasure." David's tone changed.

"You're not impressed with my news."

"Well, you see, never having known the duke —"

"But you've often heard of him."

"Oh, I've heard of him. I always had the impression of a figure vaguely pathetic."

"Yes, I know. And yet I envied him with all my heart. His life was so simple; his codes and his problems pointed all one way; his house wasn't divided against itself —"

"Like yours?"

"Yes — by Jove! — like mine!"

Emily had no comment to offer, and David didn't elaborate his theme. He watched a ray from the afternoon sun as it played with the reddish wood of the writing-table. Emily waited. He picked up the veil which she had unpinned from her hat and passed it and repassed it through his fingers.

The action seemed to open the flood-gates of his speech: "Do you remember once, a long time ago — before you went to Ocean City — before you were ill — a snowy night when you dined with us and I afterwards put you into your cab and we stood there in the snow, talking?"

"Quite vividly."

"You do? — It was the first time, I know, that I saw you as anything but one of my father's celebrities. He finds a celebrity in every bush. Our place at Long Head — I may go down there to-night — is fairly overrun with them. You see, I'm making a particularly pretty speech — you're sure you don't mind?" Emily was sure. David went on: "Father's celebrities are as citizens sometimes not so desir-

able. But he has his illusion. And it came to me that night that with you it wasn't an illusion; you weren't that sort; you had an entity of your own which was in itself thoroughly worth while. Generally, I feel rather sorry for father's celebrities; he doesn't often happen on the real ones — I'm not forgetting it was I who introduced him to you — and they circle about in the light for a brief space and then sink back into their obscurity. But you — you wouldn't; and besides, you strangely turned the tables by being sorry for me! I've wondered, since, exactly how sorry you were — or are."

Emily met his eagerness. "I'm less sorry than I was, I think. You're less helpless."

"Did I strike you as helpless then?"

"For a moment, I remember, I should have liked to protect you — I'm sure I don't know from what —"

"Do you remember asking me not to go back to the Mediterranean?"

"Yes, and it must have seemed to you a strange request. I meant it half in laughter."

"Yes, I know, you couldn't have meant it in anything else; but it's the other half of your meaning we're dealing with to-day." He had crumpled her veil hopelessly, and he laid it back on the sofa between them.

She didn't understand, and he told her, as if that made all things clear, that he had in his pocket a letter from Mrs. Dench.

"The one about the duke's death? It's curious that Jane hadn't heard."

"Yes, Parrish would have seen it in the paper."

"Heard from her mother —"

"Her mother hasn't written to her. She's waiting till her plans are more settled."

"It alters her plans? I didn't know."

"Why, yes, of course. The duchess has very generously asked her to stay on indefinitely; but she couldn't do that — it wouldn't be dignified."

Emily acquiesced. She was pretending to a greater clearness than she felt. It was all a complication she would have designated as 'foreign' and let go at that; but it seemed, in David's eyes, to be in some way concerned with herself. She wished to be shown the connecting link: "What have I to do with the duke's death and Mrs. Dench's plans and the extreme generosity of the duchess? Mrs. Dench is not planning a visit to Hornmouth? Because for that she'd have to answer to Cousin Laura, and as you say she's quarrelled with Ralph —"

Emily's tone was lively, but David's was deadly serious. "You have nothing to do with the duke's death or his wife's generosity, but with Mrs. Dench's plans I'm cherishing the hope that you'll have a great deal — in fact, that you'll spoil them utterly."

"My dear! —"

"When you asked me not to go back to the Mediterranean, as you say, it was half in laughter. You didn't know what you were asking; you didn't know me. You were vaguely sorry for my youth's so evidently having had a hard time of it; but where I went couldn't have very deeply concerned you. Now, you know me; you've seemed to like me — at least, if you haven't, I can't imagine why, during the past year, you've put up with me so much — why, metaphorically speaking, you've always let me crumple your veil.

If it weren't that the sense of adventure was in us both worn a little thin, I might, you know, have crumpled it . . . It is said that the burnt child dreads the fire, which is nonsense, for it's only the burnt child who doesn't dread it; he's learned — with infinite pains — that he's its master. And besides, you like me — I can see that — but with you it's not been a question of fire, for you're not in the least in love with me."

"No, not now. Which only shows, that I'm not blown by every passing breeze."

"Do you call me a passing breeze?" asked David. "But you *have* kept your head. I want you to lose it now."

Again she exclaimed.

"Ah, yes — you can call me my dear forever; but that doesn't mean that you'll do what I ask."

Emily's gaze was held by a special flower in the brightly patterned chintz cover of a chair across the room. "What is it that you ask?"

"Marry me."

She looked at him in utter, blank amazement. "You call that losing my head? I should say, rather, it was you who'd lost yours!"

"Then you won't?"

"I can't think that you mean what you say. It's some ghastly notion of humor —"

But David showed no gleam of it. "Why is it so impossible?"

"What has it to do with the Mediterranean?"

"It would mean that I shouldn't go back there."

"Ah — I see. It's Mrs. Dench's plan that you should."

"Mrs. Dench has done me the honor to reconsider an offer

of marriage which I made to her almost at the outset of our acquaintance."

"If you're engaged to Mrs. Dench —"

"But I'm nothing of the sort! Since I asked her to marry me — and she refused me, I tell you, point-blank, she laughed me to scorn — I grew to recognize my error — since I asked her to marry me, the circumstances are utterly changed."

"Yes," said Emily, "so I've come to see. I didn't at first — I was stupid — I thought it was Ralph; but it's all come clear — why you couldn't marry Jane — why you were at Ocean City — everything — I've fitted together all the pieces —"

David Barlow's only answer was a brow shot with pain. "I want to assure you," he said at last, "that she has no hold on me whatever!"

"You mean she has no definite right?"

"No right — no claim — no power —"

"If she has none, you surely don't need me as a little picket fence to keep her out; and against the kind of right you prove she has, I should be a magnificent protection! You say she can't hold you — you prove that she does —"

"It's a strange way of proving it, to ask another woman to marry me."

"Why do you have to marry?"

"Why can't things go on as they were before? Because they can't. Because I've a life and a career and a duty to myself, and a duty to my mother and father and the fortune that will some day be mine."

"And what would happen to all that if you married Mrs. Dench?"

"Not as much, you know, as if I didn't marry her."

"Oh, my dear, a great deal more! You're weak — weak!" Emily rose. The young man had never appeared to her in a less complimentary light. "And what would happen to all that," she asked, "if you married me?"

"Nothing whatever."

He was still seated, and she put a hand on his shoulder. "If you think so, it shows you don't know. You want to do the best you can with the bad start you've made — you have ambitions — so you come to a little invalid, a good half-dozen years your senior, who has — strangely — ambitions of her own! Why, the kind of assistance I could give you you're not strong enough to stand up against."

David's gloom turned to jest. "The way you sum it up, who would be?"

"Ralph Parrish."

"Then who would have married Jane?"

"You."

"And Mrs. Dench —"

Emily thought hard. "Perhaps the duke shouldn't have been drowned."

David cast at her the accusation to which Ralph Parrish — with more cause — had once treated Mrs. Dench, "You're the most abominable woman I've ever seen!"

"If the things I say amuse your vitiated taste —"

He replied to this by getting to his feet and taking the hand that had caressed him in both his own. "I can't see why you won't marry me. You'd have advantages."

"Yes, the advantages would all be on my side; and if you don't mind, why should I?"

"I don't say that; but why should you mind? If you're

the most abominable woman I've ever seen, you're also the most superbly selfish. It's one of the things I've liked you for —"

"We have met on an equality. Though I once told Mrs. Dench that you were the least selfish man I'd ever seen. That was before I knew you."

"And what did Mrs. Dench say?"

"She agreed with me thoroughly. But I think you weren't selfish with Mrs. Dench — you couldn't be — her own selfishness prevented."

"Oh, she was colossal!"

"I believe you're afraid of her."

"Of course I'm afraid of her." David Barlow threw back his slim hawk's head. "I'm afraid to death of her!"

"It's under the shadow of her sword, then, that you've made love to me?"

"You haven't the right to be jealous; you haven't yet said you'd marry me. You haven't yet even told me why you haven't said it."

Emily went back to the sofa; David followed her. The ray from the afternoon sun had shifted its allegiance from the reddish wood of the writing-table to a yellow stripe in the wall-paper.

"No, I'm not jealous. As you say, I haven't the right. Mrs. Dench possesses you far too completely — whatever right there is, is hers. It may be one not recognized by any of your courts of law; but it's as real — why, David, her right in you is the only real thing about you, the only real thing you have left!"

"I haven't seemed to you real?"

"No — not even when you've held my hand and crumpled

my veil and given me your light fires to play with. You see, with all that, I've got to know you, and it's only since I've known you that I've known how little reality you had. In those first days at Ocean City I rather retarded my convalescence by imagining myself in love with you. I bothered with the mystery of your immortal soul. I don't know how much soul you had when you started out, but you've no more now than a puppet on a string!"

"Mrs. Dench has that, too?"

"Every scrap. She caught you at the right moment, and she neatly pithed you. When I found I didn't love you, I thought it was merely because I loved some one else very much more —"

"Ralph Parrish?"

"Yes, Ralph Parrish. But he married Jane. He married Jane, and Mrs. Dench went back whence she had come. You and I liked each other — we've always done that — and it seemed the logical, the agreeable thing, that we should in a measure console each other. And how have we succeeded? It's been shadow shadowing shadow, the blind leading the blind —"

"Then you aren't real, either?" David was amused through his gravity.

"But I never was! That's why I have so much need of it in other people. I've longed for the tangible, the normal things; but I'm not so deceived that I think I should get them by marrying you."

"Ah — you'd get something very much better. You've often talked of the undiscovered country. We'd explore together any country you like —"

But Emily cut him short. "We'd be two restless spirits

wandering together the bright slopes of eternity — phantoms pursuing a phantom joy —”

“We’d have our careers — our ambitions.”

“We’d have them without that.”

“You mean you’d have yours,” said David. “You’ve found out the worst — I’m a selfish phantom who’s given his best to another woman — and yet you like me. I can’t see why, then —”

“You can’t see why, on the strength of my liking, I shouldn’t do what you ask? I might, if you offered me the David Barlow that Jane saw sitting a little apart in the bow of the ship’s tender, his dark head bared to the sun. But that David Barlow — what there is left of him — it isn’t within your power to offer me. He belongs to Mrs. Dench.”

“You seem to think she’s made a thorough job of it!”

“Oh — she has — and I know what I’m saying, for I hope I shan’t be misunderstood when I tell you that Ralph Parrish has made of me a job almost as thorough.”

“Then by that same token do you belong to him?”

“Part of me.”

“And the other part? That seems my chance.”

“Oh, no, that’s the chance of ‘Mrs. Dallowfield’s’ successor.”

“Then you won’t marry me?”

“You’re fresh from the house near Lexington Avenue, and you ask me that? Imagine you and me . . .”

“We never could emulate them. But you can’t expect all the marriages to be like Jane’s and Ralph’s. They’re, as you say, so damnably normal. They’re so young.”

“But, good heavens! — aren’t you young? Younger than Ralph?”

"Yes," David smiled, "but I've paid for my sins."

"You have, haven't you? It seems unfair that Ralph Parrish shouldn't have paid for his."

"Ah — Ralph's sins haven't lost him his immortal soul!"

"No," said his cousin, "and it's not because he had no soul to lose. But somehow his sins didn't touch his soul — they were sins of the flesh —"

David looked away. "Mine have been of the flesh."

"Yours — yours have been of the flesh and of the soul and of the mind. You're marked and scarred — and for you the wages are —"

"Not death?" David hoped.

"No, not death — the Mediterranean."

He turned from her, his youth all white and drawn. "I believe you're right."

She picked up her crumpled veil. "For the duke they seem to have been both. The luck's on your side."

"Oh — the luck! —" He made to her no final appeal.

Emily looked about her at her apartment in the late thirties, filled with dust and glaring light, and she presently heard the door shut on what was, in a sense, the one real opportunity of her life.

THE END.

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